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Romans 2:5-11 “Are You Ready for the Judgment?”

Intro. In v.5 Paul gives a solemn warning. If you have hardened your heart and have failed to respond to God’s goodness by repenting of your sins, you are just storing up even more wrath from God on Judgment Day. What a solemn statement! In this life God restrains His wrath against sin. God’s mercy is great, and God does not desire that any should perish. But God says in the last of v.5 that the day is coming when the righteousness judgment of God will be revealed (cf. 1:18). Even so, Hebrews 9:27 says, “It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment” (NKJV). Paul said in Acts 17:31 that God “has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.” Human history moves inexorably and unavoidably toward a day of reckoning. That is the clear teaching of the Bible.

So this is a subject that we all should be interested in, for we *all* will stand before Jesus Christ in judgment, one way or another. In v.6 of our text Paul points out that God’s judgment will be universal, “He will render to each one according to his works.” No one can escape the judgment of God (v.3b).

Furthermore, notice there are two widely different outcomes according to our text of Scripture. On the one hand you can have eternal life, as Paul says in v.7. The older you get, the more you realize that you are mortal, and life is short. But God promises you can have *eternal* life! Furthermore, in the last of v.7 we see that you can have glory. What glory we shall have as we enter the glories of heaven. We will also obtain honor. What an honor it will be to be among the saints of God, and hear the heavenly Father say, “Well done, good and faithful servant.... Enter into the joy of your Lord” (Mt. 25:21). What an honor it will be to rule and reign with Him forever (Rev. 3:21). We shall also have immortality, or literally, “incorruption.” The day is coming when we will no longer face sickness, death and decay. On resurrection day we will obtain incorruptible resurrection bodies. Finally, v.10 says that another possible outcome of judgment will be peace. The day is coming when we can have *eternal* peace in heaven. I want that outcome! I’m sure you do as well.

On the other hand, many shall face an opposite outcome when they face the Judgment of God. Paul says in the last of v.8 that others will face “wrath and fury.” Here Paul uses the two most common words for the wrath of God. The root of the first Greek word translated “indignation” refers to a settled and restrained animosity toward evil. Thus, the fullness of God’s wrath is restrained until the day of judgment. The second refers to the outburst of anger and punishment that will eventually come. The coordination of the two terms serves to emphasize the reality and the intensity of the divine displeasure poured out upon the ungodly in the day of righteous judgment. Again and again both the Old Testament *and* the New Testament teach that God’s present tolerance will end and God’s wrath will then be fully poured out upon the ungodly. This will result in the opposite of peace: tribulation and distress, as stated in v.9. The first word literally refers to pressure, being squeezed, and it also denotes the pain that comes with such pressure. Think of the worst migraine headache you have ever experienced. Multiply it several times and you will *begin* to get the picture of the kind of pressure and anguish that Paul is describing here. The second word refers to the inner distress and anguish of heart, mind, and

conscience. This certainly implies an ongoing condition. This is *not* the language of annihilation. This fits well into the biblical teaching of anguish of eternal hell.

Today, many bristle at the biblical teaching of the wrath of God. Yet the wrath of God is simply the judicial and moral response to sin and evil. Apart from the wrath of God we plunge into moral and spiritual collapse. We are left with an easy-going, indifferent God, who allows sin and evil to go unchallenged and unpunished. Is that what you really want? Regardless of what you want, you should prepare to face the truth of Scripture regarding God's judgment and what will follow.

So as you can see, there are two very different outcomes of the Judgment of God. Surely you would choose eternal life over eternal shame and anguish. So what do you need to do to be ready to face the Judgment of God? How can you obtain eternal life instead of eternal anguish? Let's look into our text for some answers.

First of all:

I. DON'T THINK THAT GOD WILL SHOW FAVORITISM

It is clear from v.3 and the context that the Jew expected to bypass the judgment of God just because he was a son of Abraham, a member of the chosen people. Instead, he expected *Gentiles* to face the judgment of God. So Paul says in vv.9-10 that the two possible outcomes of Judgment will apply to "the Jew first and also the Greek." Instead of being exempt from the judgment of God, some would be surprised to learn that the Jew will be called to give an account to God *first*. That is because they were first in line to receive God's Word, and many other spiritual blessings. Jesus said in Luke 12:48, "Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required...." If the Jew does not follow God's path of salvation, they will experience tribulation and anguish just as surely as the Gentile sinner.

There is another reason why the Jew is not exempt. In v.11 Paul says, "For God shows no partiality."¹ Literally, He does not accept someone based on their face. The issue is not whether a person is Jew or Gentile, rich or poor, male or female, educated or uneducated, black or white. We humans show favoritism, but God doesn't show favoritism toward anyone based on outward or physical criteria. Jews should have known Deut. 10:17, "For the LORD your God ... is not partial and takes no bribe."

The prophet Samuel learned the difference between human partiality, and God's impartiality. In 1 Samuel 16 we read the story of Samuel being sent to anoint one of the sons of Jesse as King of Israel. He did not know in advance which son was chosen by God. As the firstborn was introduced to Samuel, he thought for sure *he* was the Lord's anointed. He was tall, strong, good looking. He had all the qualifications that people favor. But God said in v.7, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart." Then 6 more sons passed before Samuel, and each time he thought that the Lord's anointed was before him. But God chose none of them. And the youngest son, who was not even under consideration, turned out to be the one God had chosen to be king. God chose the least, because David had the biggest heart for God. He was the one who sought after God and loved God the most.

Since God shows no favoritism based on outward considerations, you should not expect to be exempt from God's judgment just because you were born into a Christian family. Your

¹ Likewise, in Acts 10:34 Peter said, "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons."

daddy may even be a preacher, elder, deacon, or Sunday School teacher, but that will not get you special treatment at the Judgment of God. Your mother may be one of the most godly women on earth, but that alone will not secure any special treatment when it is *your* time to stand before a holy God. Just because you can talk your way into belonging to Harvest Christian Fellowship will not grant you any special treatment as well. All external factors will be meaningless on Judgment Day. Your wealth will mean absolutely nothing. Your social status will mean absolutely nothing. Your good looks will mean absolutely nothing. Your intelligence and educational level will mean absolutely nothing. God will bypass all that and look at your heart and the fruit of your life.

By the way, we should follow God's example and not show partiality or discrimination in our dealings with people. James 2:1 says, "My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ..." He went on to rebuke how even Christians show partiality to the rich and discriminate against the poor. We should not show favoritism or discrimination based on a person's race or ethnicity, especially in a court of law where justice is supposed to be blind.

God's impartiality is good news, for it means that salvation is offered to *all*. God offers Heaven equally to the Jew and the Gentile, to the lawless thief on the cross and to the law keeping Pharisee. God offers salvation to the high and to the low. Suppose that God made salvation contingent on your understanding of theology. Then the intelligent could have an unfair advantage and the ignorant would be lost. Suppose salvation was dependent on material wealth. Then that would exclude the poor. Suppose that God had made salvation contingent on the development of moral character. Then those who were born with a good heritage and who were educated under spiritual discipline would have an immense advantage over those who were born in a family of weak moral fiber. That would not be just. But anyone, with God's help, can follow the path of salvation that I will give you in this message. With God's way of salvation, the sage and the simpleton will be on the same ground, the governor and the gunman will have an equal opportunity, the holy and the harlot can both enter in. The noble and the nobody, the sophisticate and the savage, whoever you may be, you all can be saved regardless of your position in life!

So God's impartiality on Judgment Day offers hope to many, but it is a warning to the privileged. Don't assume that God will show favoritism or partiality to you.

Now let's consider the second main truth from this Scripture regarding how to be prepared for the judgment of God. You must:

II. REPENT AND TURN FROM A LIFE OF SIN

First let me show why repentance is necessary. Paul gives an underlying principle of God's judgment in v.6. There we see that God "will render to each one according to his works." You will face an impartial Judge who has a comprehensive record of your deeds, and if your sins are still on your record, you will face divine retribution. He will pay back (*apodidomi*) what is due. This is not a new concept; it is affirmed throughout Scripture and Paul comes very close to quoting Prov. 24:12² here. Likewise, Jer. 17:10 says, "I the LORD search the heart... to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds." Jesus likewise said in Matthew 16:27, "For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done." God is a God of justice and righteousness. He insists that every sin be paid for (see also Ps. 62:12; Eccl. 1:14; Hos. 12:2).

² "... will he not repay man according to his work?" (Prov. 24:12).

Right now my focus is upon the unrepentant sinner. God will judge and condemn him *by* his works. Rev. 20:12 describes what will happen on Judgment Day. John says, “And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened.... And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done.” Every time you sin against God it is recorded in the books of heaven. You will have no defense when you face the charges of a lifetime of sin. In fact, if you sin 10 times a day by the time you reach the age of 60 you will have sinned over 200,000 times! As a result, such people will face God’s wrath and fury (v.8). They will be cast out to endure tribulation and distress (v.9).

But there is hope. Peter said in Acts 3:19, “Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out....” (NKJV). Yes! Your sins can be blotted out if you repent. That’s because they are transferred to the account of Christ, who paid for your sins by dying on the cross.

Since sin is what condemns us, God demands that we repent of our sins as a condition of forgiveness. Repentance is mentioned in v.4 as the very thing that God seeks. Repentance is a change of mind that leads to a change in our beliefs and how we live. Now let’s look at v.8 and see the kind of life that we must repent of.

A. Repent of a Self-seeking Life - An unrighteous person is wrapped up in what pleases him from the time he enters the world as a baby. The word translated “self-seeking” (*eritheia*) in v.8 refers to someone who desires to put himself forward; one who has selfish ambition; and one who will resort to any means to get ahead, including resorting to strife, trickery, bribery, or whatever. It seems most people who run for public office are motivated by selfish ambition, and they will smear their opponents, lie, and do just about anything to get elected.³ Self-seeking leads to a contentious attitude toward the Lord and others. That is why “strife” is often associated with this word (2 Cor. 12:20; Gal. 5:20; Jas. 3:16).

Recently I saw on a Christian’s Facebook page where they proudly posted, “You’re either on my side, by my side, or in my way.” That seems rather self-centered to me!

Do you have a self-seeking attitude? Do you feel that you have to get your way; you have to be on top? Are you frequently involved in conflict and strife as you try to manipulate people to accommodate your self-serving interests? If so, you are on your way to a terrible outcome on Judgment Day. You need to repent of that self-centered life *now*.

B. Repent of Disobedience to the Truth - This phrase in v.8 literally means “to refuse to be persuaded by the Truth.” Based on the context, the Truth here is the Truth of God, as it is manifested in nature, conscience, and especially in the Word of God. Truth is an objective reality rather than subjectively determined. Such divine truth must be obeyed and followed. It includes the commands of God’s Word. God’s shows you the right way to live, the paths of righteousness. But how often have you refused to follow God’s way, and instead have followed your own way? The truth of God also includes the truth of the Gospel, that you are a sinner, and you must repent of your sin and trust in God’s Son Jesus to be your Savior? Have you been persuaded to believe in Christ as your Savior? Up to this point you may have said, “No, I don’t need to believe in Christ. I am OK just as I am.” That is the way most Jews felt in the time of Christ. Until you repent and believe on the Son of God, you are not obeying the truth.

³ In fact, the only known pre-New Testament occurrence of the word is in Aristotle, who uses it to decry politicians who seek office for private gain rather than the public good (Douglas Moo, p.75).

Folks, it is past time for some of you to stop living in disobedience to the truth. It is time to repent, and obey God, and the truth of the gospel.

C. Repent of Being Persuaded by Unrighteousness – That is the literal meaning of v.8. This happens all the time. People come up to the typical unbeliever and tempt them to do something wrong. They are easily persuaded by unrighteousness. They go along with the crowd that is living in pursuit of sin. That's because our sin nature is bent toward sin.

D. Repent of Doing Evil – Paul says in v.9 that “tribulation and distress [will be] for every human being who does⁴ evil.” The present tense describes someone who keeps on doing wrong. The word translated “evil” (*kakos*) is not even the strongest word for evil (*poneros*). It refers to doing what is wrong, bad, injurious or destructive. How many times have you done wrong? How many times have you hurt someone with your words or actions? We need to repent of such things.

Finally, in this text of Scripture Paul calls upon us to:

III. OBTAIN THE KIND OF LIFE THAT DOES GOOD

We all understand that unrepentant sinners will be judged by their works. But evangelical believers have trouble applying vv.6-7 to Christians. Yet Scripture does teach that we will be rewarded for our good works at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Yet that is not what Paul is talking about here.

Is Paul saying in v.7 that eternal life can be obtained by good works? That could not be! Paul himself clearly teaches in Romans 3:20, 4:5 and elsewhere (Eph. 2:8-9; Titus 3:5) that we are not saved by our works. So there are two primary interpretations that we are left with. First, he could be speaking theoretically. If you *could* live such a life that is described in v.7, then eternal life would be the result. Paul uses that line of argument elsewhere (cf. Gal. 3:21; 5:3; cf. Mark 10:17-22). Yet only Jesus, the Son of God, could live such a life. Paul will show in chapter 3:9-20 that our sinful depravity makes salvation by works impossible.⁵ The other interpretation is that our works will *demonstrate* that we are saved. Remember, God's judgment will be a public event. While God can see the heart, man cannot. So when God judges us based on our works, all can see that such a judgment is just and fair. Our works will either justify our condemnation, or our works will demonstrate that salvation has indeed taken place. How you live your life is a much better indication that you are a Christian than mere profession. James says that faith without works is dead.

Here Paul is arguing against the person who feels they are saved just because they are a Jew, or just because they belong to some religion. But the proof is in the pudding. Your life and works reveal whether or not there is true repentance and faith in your heart.

So the question is how do we obtain the kind of life described in v.7? Well, we need to get the horse before the cart. Jesus said in Matthew 12:33, “Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad, for the tree is known by its fruit.” The only way to produce the fruit of good works is to allow God to change you from the inside out.

We used to have a peach tree at our other house. It would blossom every spring, and then little peaches would appear. The fruit would grow and we would hope to harvest some sweet,

⁴ This is literally “who keeps on accomplishing [*katergazomai*] evil.”

⁵ Douglas Moo favors this view.

juicy peaches by August. But every year, the fruit would go bad from disease. The problem was not so much the fruit, but with the tree. The tree was bad, so its fruit was bad. But if the tree had been good, it's fruit would have been good.

Even so, if v.8 describes you, you still need to repent of your sin, believe in Jesus, and you will be born again. God will create new life within, and then you will have the ability to have the kind of life described in vv.7 & 10. Eph. 2:8-9 says that we are saved by faith and not by works. But Paul goes on to say in v.10 that we are created in Christ Jesus unto good works.

Now let's look at the kind of life that describes the true Christian, who will obtain eternal life. See if this describes you:

A. A True Christian Has Eternal Priorities – What are you seeking after? What do you want above most anything else? Well in Philippians 2:21 Paul said, “For all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus” (NKJV). Unbelievers are self-seeking. In Mt. 6:32 Jesus said the Gentiles seek after such things as food and clothing. In contrast, Jesus said in v.33, “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (NKJV). Colossians 3:1 says, “If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God” (NKJV). Hebrews 11:6 says that God “is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (NKJV). In v.7 of our text we see that those who obtain eternal life “seek for glory and honor and immortality.” Speaking of glory and honor, Jesus said in John 5:44, “How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?” We should seek the honor and glory that comes from God. As Christians our desire should be to please God and to hear Him say, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” In Romans 2:29 Paul says the true believer is one “whose praise is not from men but from God” (NKJV). Furthermore, the true Christian seeks “immortality.” We seek things that have eternal value. Hebrews 13:14 says, “For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come.”

Does this describe you? Do you seek things that have eternal value? If so, then you have no reason to fear the judgment of God. But if you pursue what is sinful, and only has temporal value, how can you say that you are a Christian?

B. A True Christian Works What Is Good – Paul says in v.10, “but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good....” The present tense of the verb “does” points to the consistent actions of a person's life. True believers are characterized by good works, and by a good character. We do good, not evil. We seek to help rather than hurt.

What good works did you do this past week? Did you help someone in need? Did you do an act of love and kindness? Did you speak or act on behalf of the weak?

Finally:

C. A True Christian Perseveres in Doing Good - In v.7 Paul speaks of eternal life being given “to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality,” Notice it is by patient continuance [*hupomone*] that they do good. We should keep on doing good. A few good works here and there will not do. Those whose faith is only a profession rather than a possession will quit doing good works except occasionally. However, the general pattern of a true believer's life is to do good works with patient endurance. We can also say that steadfast endurance is indeed needed for a life of good works. True Christians don't quit but persevere.

This was certainly true of Noah, who built that ark for 120 years, in spite of the jeers of others. This was true of Abraham and many other saints of God. Though they had their moments of straying from God, overall they stayed faithful to God. Then Jesus gave the parable of the soils. Some seed fell upon the hard soil. Some fell on rocky soil with shallow dirt and so the plant wilted under the heat of the sun and never produced fruit. Some fell in the soil that also had thorn seeds that grew and choked the good plants, and they also never became fruitful. But some fell in the good soil, and in Luke's account (8:15) we see that such soil represents "those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep it and bear fruit with patience." The true believer does not quit doing good. We keep at it. Anyone can do good works here and there but we Christians keep doing good works for others; we also keep doing the good work of offering worship, praise, and prayers to God.

When you stand before God someday, will He see a life that has been persistent in doing good works? Are *you* ready for the judgment of God?

Conclusion: I hope you have been able to see the characteristics of the life that is approved by God, the kind of life that will obtain eternal life, glory, honor, and peace. So I ask you. Do you see yourself in v.7 or v.8? 2 Peter 1:10 says, "Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure..." (NKJV). The difference between eternal life and eternal condemnation is too great. Make sure you are truly saved.

Don't make the mistake of thinking that you are saved by virtue of your Christian heritage or affiliations. Don't make the mistake of thinking that you are saved because you merely act like a Christian at times, by mixing in some religious deeds and good works from time to time. There is one way of salvation: by repentance of sin and by faith in Jesus Christ. The only way to obtain the kind of life described in vv.7 & 10 is to repent and trust in Jesus as your Savior.

Suppose a band of thieves kidnapped my son. There is only one thing I want from them: I want my son back. If one of them should ask me to forget about a ransom. He will keep my son but pay for our new church building. I would repudiate the offer and ask for my son. Should they offer to pay for broadcasting my sermons on every available station, I would repudiate their offer; I want my son.

Likewise, you can live a lifetime of religious works; you can give over \$100,000 to the Lord's work in a lifetime. Yet at the judgment, the issue that is first and foremost in the mind of God is this: What have you done with My Son? If you have considered His shed blood as a worthless thing, and instead have put your trust in what *you* have done, or in the advantages you were born with, or religious affiliation, do you think that God is going to accept anything else you have to offer? [Adapted from Barnhouse, p.51].

Judgment Day is coming. Are you ready for the Judgment? Are you sure that God will affirm that you are among the ones who will enjoy the blessings of heaven? If not, I invite you to repent of your sin, and trust in Christ as your Savior today. Don't delay.

Sources: Donald Grey Barnhouse, *Expositions of Bible Doctrines Taking the Epistle to the Romans as a Point of Departure*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952); F.F. Bruce, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963); Bruce Corley & Curtis Vaughan, *Romans: A Study Guide Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976); Stephen Felker, *Devotional & Explanatory Notes on the Entire Bible* (Col. Hghts, VA: Published by Author), 2022; H.A. Ironside, *Lectures on Romans* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers 1928); Halford E. Luccock, *Preaching Values in the Epistles of Paul*, Vol. 1 [Romans, 1 Cor.] (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959); John MacArthur, Jr., *Without Excuse: Principles of God's Judgment: Study Notes on Romans 2:1-16* (Panorama City, CA: Word of Grace Communications, 1990); Leon McBeth, *Exegetical & Practical*

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