

The Judge Who Always Gets it Right

Romans 2:6–16

Studies in Romans #9

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Children, your parents do their best to raise you and to train you for being adults. And part of that is to discipline you. But you know that sometimes your parents say if you do something they'll discipline you, but they forget. Sometimes they're too tired to do anything. Sometimes they discipline you while your brother or sister gets away with the same thing. We're not perfect children. But God is. He is righteous. This means he always follows his own rules and he punishes those who don't.

And that's why we who are unrighteous need to be righteous in order for us to be acceptable to our righteous God. And so Paul has said in 1:17 that our God loves us so much that he given us the gift of righteousness in his own Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus lived according to God's rules righteously and then seeing us condemned in our unrighteousness he went to the cross to die—the righteous in the place of the unrighteous. And we now become righteous when we accept this gift of Jesus Christ, which makes us acceptable to God.

And so from 1:18 on Paul has been showing us why we need the righteousness of God and how we do not have our own righteousness. In 1:18–32 he has said that the Gentile world is unrighteous. And in 2:1–5 he began to show how the Jewish world is also unrighteous. He wants to show the Jews that they are no better off than the Gentiles they stand around and condemn in self-righteousness.

Now in 2:6–16 he wants to show that God is a righteous and just Judge of both Jews and Gentiles. So he is bringing the full force of the law down upon the Jews. He is not tell them how they can go about earning their own justification but about how they stand condemned under God’s judgment, like the Gentiles, if they reject God’s righteousness in Jesus Christ.

God’s Judgment is Righteousness (vv. 6–10)

And the first thing he establishes here is that *God’s judgment is righteous* in verses 6–10. We’ve all heard the stories of unrighteous and unjust judges, haven’t we? Judges with prejudice, judges rigging the system to get kickbacks from their judgments, and judges bribed by lawyers. How is God different? **He will render to each one according to his works** (v. 6).

There is an invisible scale on which we are storing up all our imperfect, sin-stained works. And in the end, God will bring out the scale, show us our good works on this side and our bad works on the other. And he will then give us what we deserved. There will be no extra credit based on your descent from which you’ve come or the dignity of who you are or the quality of what you’ve done.

He describes this in verses 7–10. He starts off in verse 7 with the reward of eternal life, then in verses 8–9 with the reward of eternal punishment, and then comes back to eternal life in verse 10:

to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life;

but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek.

This is the standard of God's judgment. Those who do good and seek God's glory, honor, and immortality he will give eternal life, glory, honor, and peace. I don't want you to be confused about what Paul is saying so keep two points in mind. First, as he will later go on to say in chapter 3, there is no one who does good and no one who is righteous. Outside of Jesus Christ and apart from God's grace in our lives we would never seek anything ultimately good. "But why does Paul say what he says here, then?" That's the second thing you have to keep in mind. Based on 1:16–17 and later in 3:21 and following, justification is on account of Christ's obedience, which we receive by faith. And because we are justified, we are changed people who actually do begin to seek the glory, honor, and immortality of God with the help of God's Spirit, for which he will graciously reward us with eternal life. That's why in contrast to justification being *on account of* Christ's obedience Paul says here that our judgment is *according to* our works.¹ So justification is by faith alone; but the law judgment is according to works.² And our works will evidence our faith in Jesus Christ.³

¹ Hodge, 50; Philip, *The Power of God*, 39; Stott, *The Message of Romans*, 83.

² James Philip, *The Power of God*, 39; Stott, *The Message of Romans*, 83.

³ Nygren, *Romans*, 127–128.

God's Judgment is Impartial (vv. 11–16)

So God's judgment is righteous. Secondly, *God's judgment is impartial*: **For God shows no partiality** (v. 11). Children, what does impartial mean? Imagine you and your brother or sister get into a fight. Then comes in mom or dad. Who's side do they take? Do they say, "I love Cyprian more so Caiden is wrong?" Do they say, "I like Caiden more so Daxton is wrong?" To be impartial means that God doesn't take sides; he doesn't say he likes one person more than another.

Paul illustrates this principle in verses 12–15. How impartial is God when it comes to judging Jews, who had the Old Testament law that declared his righteousness, and judging Gentiles, who did not have his laws on tablets of stones? Listen to this: **For all who have sinned without the law** (meaning the Gentiles who did not have the laws of God on stone) **will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law** (meaning the Jews who had the laws of God on stone) **will be judged by the law** (v. 12).

Then he goes on to elaborate on this: **For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified**⁴ (v. 13). Did you hear that? He is implying that while the Jew *has* the law, the Gentile *does* the law!

For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them. (vv. 14–15)

⁴ For the hypothetical view, see Calvin, 47; Stott, *The Message of Romans*, 86.

Again, this means that God is not partial. He judges all men by the same standard of his righteousness. It is not whether you are a sincere agnostic or adherent of another religion, as the new Roman Catholic Catechism states,⁵ it is not whether your heart in right place, it is not whether you try your best and let God do the rest. No merit with God. There is no favoritism with God. There is no bending the rules with God. This means that no matter who you are or where you live, **by nature...the work of the law is written on your heart**. As 1:18 and following said, by nature everyone knows God exists. And so by nature everyone knows there is a righteous standard in the universe. And this is why cultures and societies have worshipped things they called “gods” and has come up with standards of living.

And so as an impartial judge, the bar of God’s justice is raised as high as God’s own character. This is so important for us to realize. Our view of God affects our view of ourselves and how we are saved. If we say we are not so bad by nature and that we can do good, then because God’s standard is achievable we say that our salvation really is self-help. If we say that God is really in his essence nothing but love and will save all in the end, then we make his law pointless and his salvation powerless.

And so Paul was saying to the Jews of his day, “If you’re going to seek justification on the basis of the law, you had better be prepared to show a personal, perfect, and perpetual obedience to it.” He says the same to us. And this is bad news because it is an unachievable goal to reach because of our sins.

⁵ Section 847.

“Then what hope is there,” you may be asking? The same God who judges impartially justifies impartially. The same God who punishes impartially saves impartially. The good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ is that we who are unrighteous by nature and by action and who therefore deserve the righteous judgment of God can become righteous by trusting in Jesus Christ’s righteousness as our own.

God’s Judgment is Certain (v. 16)

Paul ends by saying that this righteous and impartial judgment of God *is certain: on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus* (v. 16). As we say in the Creed, “he shall come again to judge the living and the dead.” The question is, which side of the judgment will you be on that day? If you are trusting in yourself or the things you do to get you a pass on that day, the final judgment should cause you to fear. “But what about us as believers?” The thought of that final day should not cause in us a mortal fear, but it should cause in us a joy that is inexpressible. Why? Because Jesus already underwent the judgment we deserve for our sins. Because on that day we will be freed from our remaining sins. Because on that day we will see him face to face. Because on that day we will enter into the glory and joy of the Lord prepared for us. That day should not cause me to fear; it should motivate me to live for Christ now so that I am more prepared than I was yesterday to enter his eternal kingdom.

If you’re not trusting in him today, I want you to join us. Forsake your sins. Stop trying to justify yourself before God. Receive Christ. Amen.