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Romans

...eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; Romans 2:7

As noted in verse 6, care needs to be taken when evaluating this train of thought from Paul. If this verse, which is a part of a greater whole, is quoted as a stand-alone, then of course one would come to the conclusion that, "Aha, eternal life is based upon works." This is contrary to the scope and reality of Scripture because after salvation, many have fallen – even such greats as Peter and Paul. Peter, in Galatians 2:11-16, was not "straightforward about the truth of the gospel." In essence, he failed to endure. Paul admitted his failings as well –

"Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?" (NIV)

We are bound by our human limitations even after salvation and therefore, if it were up to us to receive eternal life, then we would go through a terrible cycle of uncertainty as our relationship with God changed back and forth – saved, unsaved, saved, unsaved, saved, unsaved, saved...." What a neurotic bunch who call themselves Christians! And, how pitiful – woe to the one who happened to error prior to his final call home, "I knew you, and then I never knew you...!"

The great Bible scholar Albert Barnes erringly states this – “Nor has God ever promised eternal life to people unless they so persevere in a life of holiness as to show that this is their character...”

This is incorrect as is evidence by 2 Peter 1:1-9 and which culminates in verse 9. In verse 1, Peter states that those he is addressing have “obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ.” In other words, they are saved believers. He then explains what that can mean for the called soul in verse 3 and 4. However, in verses 5-8, he states what the individual should do and which is what Paul is referring to in today's verse in Romans 2:7. If one fails to carefully follow what is God's intent and desire for His saved children, the result is verse 9 – “For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins.”

Yes, there are those who have been saved and yet they “have forgotten” that they were “cleansed from” their old sins! One cannot continue “in doing good” in the biblical sense if they have forgotten their salvation. Therefore, eternal life is granted exactly as the rest of the Bible proclaims, by grace through faith. Abraham was declared righteous by simple faith prior to the sign of that righteousness (circumcision). Jesus Himself says that it is belief that saves –

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” John 3:16

Paul's continued writing in Romans will bear this out as well. Understanding this, “those who by patient continuance in doing good” is speaking of rewards as was noted in verse 6; God will “render to each one according to his deeds.” These deeds are to result in:

- 1) Glory – This includes praise, high note, and what is renowned for that which is beautiful, majestic, splendid, etc. It is the highest point of exultation and could be considered as the greatest pomp and pageantry that God could bestow upon His creatures. This glory will be in a state which excludes anything which is lowly or base.

2) Honor – is the conferring of title and position in the heavenly realm for the deeds of righteousness. There will be varying degrees of honor just as there are varying degrees in the brightness of the stars. Each will be bestowed to commend the level of faithfulness exhibited. And yet, there will be no jealousy or contempt between conferrals. All will be rewarded with a filled cup, but the cup will be of varying size. No one will be dissatisfied with their overflowing container.

3) Immortality – This is the life which man was authorized to participate in at the beginning and which he lost. Never again will the redeemed face corruption, death, and returning to the earth. There will be no sickness or sadness in this state; only eternal felicity.

Life application: Rewards will come to all of God's redeemed based on the level of progression they follow which is noted in 2 Peter 1. For those who forget their salvation in this earthly walk, God never will. They will be granted eternal life based on the faith they exercised which pleased God enough to call them His own, but the rewards will be fewer and of less magnitude. Let us each strive to please God with our lives now and not be "shortsighted, even to blindness." May the Lord bestow upon you the fullness of His riches.

...but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath,... Romans 2:8

This verse is in contrast to that of verse 7 as indicated by the word "but." If you will note though, in verse 7 Paul begins with the positive benefit "eternal life" and then explains the "who" and the "how" next. It is obtained for those who "by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality." However, in verse 8, he gives the "who" and the "how" first – it is "to those who are self seeking and do not obey the truth, but unrighteousness." Only then does he give the negative result – "indignation and wrath."

In this structure, it seems that Paul wants to show that God truly wants to lavish His benefits upon those who are willing to accept them, however and in contrast, He is longsuffering with those who act contrary to His will, but there is an end to His patience.

Those who are “self-seeking” can also be rendered “contentious. The Greek translation of the Old Testament renders this same word as “rebellious” in Deuteronomy 21:20 –

And they shall say to the elders of his city, “This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious; he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton and a drunkard.”

These people have a will directed toward themselves and which is at contention with God. They hate his divine will and exercise their thoughts, actions, and attitudes against Him. What God detests, such as abortion, sexual perversion, or disobedience to parents is what they pursue, simply because they want to cast off His rule and authority. They are unwilling to “obey the truth” and so they work out their own set of guidelines for living and conducting their affairs. Instead of pursuing the divine will, they “obey unrighteousness.” In this, they yield to sin and let it consume them.

This, of course, fits most people to some degree, but this is speaking of those who stubbornly knock on sin’s door and allow it lead their steps. Instead of light, they live by darkness. For those who pursue this path, there is but one end – “indignation and wrath.” This phrase comes from the Greek *thumos kai orge*. This is an expression of God’s actual hatred of sin which results in the outpouring of His anger as is displayed in divine judgment. The “indignation” indicates what we would perceive as internal – the thing which displeases God. The “wrath” then is the manifestation of that displeasure in His action.

Those who act contrary to God may think that they have the upper hand or free reign to snub Him, but as it says in Hebrews 10:31, “It is a fearful thing to fall into

the hands of the living God.” In the end, there will only be terror for those who fail to repent and bow the knee before the Creator.

Life application: God has shown us what leads to life and happiness and what leads to death and condemnation. He has done it through nature and He has further shown us in His word. Take time to meditate upon what you perceive as morally right and morally wrong and then compare it to His word. If there is a conflict between the two, then it is you who needs to adjust. God is clear, but we often misunderstand.

...tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek; Romans 2:9

This verse continues the anticipated rewards for the deeds mentioned in the previous verse – “but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath.” The consequences of unrepentant sin are two-fold – suffering in this life and suffering in the next life.

Along with “indignation and wrath” comes “tribulation.” This is the word *thlipsis* and the verb carries the sense of pressing, such as when crushing grapes. This then is the pressure and despair which occurs after sin is committed – perhaps getting an incurable disease resulting from sexual immorality. This would be magnified if the sinner passed that on to loved ones. Another example may be receiving a death sentence for committing a crime. The pressure of what is coming becomes an overwhelming and crushing misery.

The word “anguish” comes from the Greek *stenochoria*. This is a word used exclusively by Paul and comes from two different words – *steno* meaning “narrow” and *chora* meaning “space.” The thought here might be something like being buried alive in a coffin. There is no room to move and only complete anguish of the soul. Edgar Allen Poe, a master of understanding the terrors of the human mind, wrote these words in *The Premature Burial* –

“And now, amid all my infinite miseries, came sweetly the cherub Hope -- for I thought of my precautions. I writhed, and made spasmodic exertions to force open the lid: it would not move. I felt my wrists for the bell-rope: it was not to be found. And now the Comforter fled for ever, and a still sterner Despair reigned triumphant; for I could not help perceiving the absence of the paddings which I had so carefully prepared -- and then, too, there came suddenly to my nostrils the strong peculiar odor of moist earth. The conclusion was irresistible. I was not within the vault. I had fallen into a trance while absent from home-while among strangers -- when, or how, I could not remember -- and it was they who had buried me as a dog -- nailed up in some common coffin -- and thrust deep, deep, and for ever, into some ordinary and nameless grave.

As this awful conviction forced itself, thus, into the innermost chambers of my soul, I once again struggled to cry aloud. And in this second endeavor I succeeded. A long, wild, and continuous shriek, or yell of agony, resounded through the realms of the subterranean Night.”

This anguish of eternal hopelessness is the just and due penalty for “every soul of man who does evil.” The opposite is reflected in the Bible as well. In David’s writings he uses the terminology several times to reflect what can be expected for those who trust in the Lord. Instead of a narrow confinement there will be ease of movement in spacious places –

I called on the Lord in distress;
The Lord answered me and set me in a broad place.
The Lord is on my side;
I will not fear.
What can man do to me? Psalm 118: 5, 6

And yet, in what is the most ironic twist of all, Jesus tells us that to reach the broad spaces of salvation, there is only a narrow gate. Likewise, to be sentenced to the torturous confines of eternity apart from God, there is a wide and easy path one may tread –

“Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it. Matthew 7:13, 14

In the end, the choice is up to each of us and it includes all people, “of the Jew first and also of the Gentile.”

Life application: Is eternal confinement and misery worth a moment of sin? It is by far better to confine oneself now in this life than to lack in our eternal home. And it is surely better to reject the broad and spacious life of sin in order to gain eternal release in a paradise of glory. As you walk through life today, consider that each choice bears eternal consequences. Even if you are saved, your rewards will be lessened by following the wrong path now. Stay in tune with the Spirit and allow Him to fill you and guide you.