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The Justness of God's Judgment

Romans 2:6-16, He will render to each one according to his works: ⁷ to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; ⁸ but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. ⁹ There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, ¹⁰ but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. ¹¹ For God shows no partiality.

God's Judgment and the Law

¹² For all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law. ¹³ For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified. ¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ 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 ¹⁶ on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus. ¹

The "Fairness" of God

¹ *The Holy Bible : English standard version*. 2001 (Ro 2:6–16). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

How many of you have ever asked the question, "Is God fair?" If you have, you are not alone. This question is raised on more than one occasion in the Bible.² After asserting his blamelessness, Job cried:

Job 31:35, 37, "Oh that I had one to hear me! Behold, here is my signature; let the Almighty answer me!... I would declare to Him the number of my steps; like a prince I would approach Him."

Job in essence says, "*Unfair! I have done nothing wrong and yet I suffer! Oh how I wish God would answer me.*"

Paul says this:

Romans 9:13-14, "Just as it is written, 'Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.' What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there?"

In other words, Paul is saying "*Before Jacob and Esau had done anything wrong, God had set His love on Jacob. Is that fair? Is God just?*"

Then the parable of the laborers in the vineyard we read this:

Matthew 20:10-12, "And when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more; and they also received each one a denarius [their agreed upon wage for the day]. And when they received it, they grumbled at the landowner [representing God here], saying, 'These last men have worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden and the scorching heat of the day.'"

Do you hear the accusation and so the implication, "Could God be fair in granting grace to ones who seem less deserving?"

And then there is the story of the prodigal. In his anger over the prodigal brother, the older son tells his father who represents God in the parable.

Luke 15:29-30, "Look! For so many years I have been serving you, and I have never neglected a command of yours; and yet you have never given me a kid, that I might be merry with my friends; but when this son of yours came, who has devoured your wealth with harlots, you killed the fatten calf for him."

Do you hear the accusation in the older brother's response, "Father! That's not fair!"

There are times when life seems unfair. And our natural response, like Job's, is to assume man's innocence and so to question God's justice! And that no doubt is what prompted Paul in his writing of this passage. In the opening chapters of this epistle, Paul discusses God's wrath. In Romans 1:18 we learn of its nature, expression, objects and cause.

In Romans 1:19-2:5, 17-29 we learn of its recipients. They are the immoral religious, the Gentile who has never heard the gospel, (Romans 1:19-32). There are the moral religious, the Jew/Christian who has a

² The same is raised in such passages as Habakkuk 1:12-17; Psalm 73:1-14; Jonah 4:1-3; Romans 3:3; John 21:21.

unique relationship with God on account of His promise to Abraham, (Romans 2:1-5, 17-29).

Now the natural response in light of this teaching is to question the "fairness" or "justness" of God's judgment. How is it that God could condemn ones who have never heard of Jesus? How is it that God could condemn ones who have done so much in His name?

It is in anticipation of these questions, Paul includes a very important phrase in his treatment of God's judgment.

Romans 2:5: "But because of your stubborn and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous [or the fair, just] judgment of God."

With the phrase "the righteous judgment of God" Paul digresses in his teaching to address the 'Justness' of God's Judgment. Notice the first point that Paul makes; God's judgment is "Just" because it is retributive.

God's Judgment is Retributive

Romans 2: 5-6, "But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to every man according to his deeds."³

Verse 6 is a quote from Psalm 62:12. The expression could literally be translated, "who will repay every man his due..." The idea is that of requital or retribution. And with this we are introduced to Paul's first word of defense on behalf of the wrath of God. God's judgment is just because it is

1. Directed against individuals according to what they have earned!
2. Based on the deeds of the individual man.

God's judgment is not hit or miss; it is not unjust; it is not unfair. It is based upon what a person does.⁴ It is RETRIBUTIVE, a paying back of that which is earned! Now to explain this and so to prove it, availing himself of a chiasmic structure, Paul divides all of mankind into two groups or camps in Romans 2:7-10.

Those Who Receive Eternal Life

Romans 2:7, "To those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life": let's talk about this verse phrase by phrase...

God's just is "to those who by perseverance in doing good."⁵ The word for "perseverance" denotes an active fortitude. It is used of the soldier who in the thick of a hard battle gives as much as he gets; he fights to the end. And so, to those who do what is noble and right to the very end. And who are those?

³ ὃς ἀποδώσει ἐκάστῳ κατὰ τὰ ἔργα αὐτοῦ;

⁴ Compare also Isaiah 3:10-11; Jeremiah 17:10; Ecclesiastes 11:9; 12:14; Matthew 16:27; 25:31-46; John 5:28-29; 1 Corinthians 3:12-15; 4:5; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Galatians 6:7-8; Ephesians 6:8; Revelation 2:23; 11:18; 20:12, 13.

⁵ τοῖς μὲν καθ' ὑπομονὴν ἔργου ἀγαθοῦ

They are ones who actively, passionately, and "to the bitter end" seek for three things in their life.

The first thing that they seek for is glory. In the New Testament this word is used primarily of the divine and heavenly radiance, the loftiness and so the majesty of God. In the *LXX* it is used to translate *כָּבוֹד*/*cabe*, - glory, heavy, weight.

Thus to "seek for glory" is not to seek for your own exaltation. Rather, it is to seek and pursue God's, since He is the only One who has genuine glory! It is to pursue the glory of God in everything and in every way.⁶ It is to live in light of the weightiness of God's being, and so to give preference to God in all things!

The second thing that they seek is honor. This has reference to the approbation of God in contrast to the praises of men. To "seek for honor" is to seek for God's approval in all things and at all times! And hence, it is NOT to be a man-pleaser, but a "God-honor"!

The third thing they seek is immortality. This denotes the state of not being subject to corruption. To seek for immortality is to seek that which is incorruptible and so that which is not subject to decay. Now this would include not only things that are NOT given to decay, BUT the state itself, which in Scripture is God's Kingdom. Therefore, to "seek for immortality" is to be one who in all things, "seek[s] first His kingdom and His righteousness." (Matthew 6:33)

Now to those who persevere in such a quest, who in and through all things have God's glory, approbation, and Kingdom at the forefront of their effort, receive eternal life.

We have discussed this term, eternal life, before. The phrase could be rendered, "Life pertaining to the age." From this we see that "eternal life" does not refer to an endless existence (those in hell have that, Isaiah 66:22-24), but an existence in the age to come where God rules with His people! This is the right and the reward of everyone who diligently and fervently seek the Lord, His Kingdom, and His glory. They begin "the life which pertains to the age to come." In fact, Christ referenced this life when He said, I came that they might have life, and might have it abundantly." (John 10:10)

What a glorious blessing! Yet such a blessing is only reserved, according to this text, for those who deserve it! With this, skip down to Romans 2:10; the A¹ of the chiasm, where Paul repeats the truth and yet adds to it.

Romans 2:10, "But glory and honor and peace to every man who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek."

As with Romans 2:7, we find the terms "glory and honor." These are the same words as the ones in verse 7, yet there is a change here. Not only is this the desire and highest longing of those who deserve eternal life, here we learn that it also is their reward! "Glory and honor" is both the goal and the reward of the one who earns eternal life. Now to this Paul adds one more blessing.

This added blessing is peace. This is a beautiful addition. As you know the Greco-Roman world

⁶ Compare. Romans 5:2; 8:18, 21, 30; 9:23; 1 Corinthians 2:7; 15:43; 2 Corinthians 4:17; Col. 3:4.

understood peace to be the absence of war or strife. In contrast, in the Kingdom of God the word references a positive benefit. It denotes (1) the STATE of being "at peace" with God (Romans 5:1-2) and so (2) the resulting condition of inner serenity; that is, knowing that all is well!

Not only do "glory and honor" await the servant of God, but also "peace!" Now what is required for us to receive these blessings? Again, we must "do good." For this is the reward "to every man who does good." As we have seen before, to all who consistently practice that which is noble and right, God grants eternal life. Now because of the covenant, this promise is given, "to the Jew first and also to the Greek." By this Paul is saying, in keeping with the priority of the Covenant which God made with Abraham, the reward that a life of obedience brings belongs to the people of God first, and then to the nations!⁷

From this you must see that God's wrath is righteous/fair. It is not based on what you know or don't know, or on what you have or don't have. Rather God's wrath is based on what each individual does, their deeds! Therefore, to the one who does good, who seeks after that which is right, God will reward them with eternal life!

Now I don't know about you, but that seems rather fair. If you live your life with the passion for God, His Kingdom, His glory, and His honor, you will earn the right to life eternal! That is the first camp into which Paul divides mankind. Yet notice the justness or fairness of God is seen also when we consider the second camp, those who receive wrath and indignation.

Those Who Receive Wrath And Indignation

Romans 2:8, "But to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation."

This verse begins with those "who are selfishly ambitious." Literally Paul is writing about those who are self-seeking. The word for "selfishly ambitious" is derived from *erithos*, a hireling. It originally meant working for pay selfishly, with careless disregard. And so it came to acquire the sense of selfishness "to those who are out for themselves..."

Secondly, Paul refers to those who "do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness."⁸ When a person is living wholly for themselves, they naturally reject the truth of God's word. Instead, they conduct themselves according to their own wants and rules, which in this case is the rule of unrighteousness, that which is not according to God's standard of right. To those who so live, they receive "wrath and indignation."⁹ Both terms refer to the receiving of God's disfavor, and yet there is a subtle difference in the two words.

The term "wrath" carries the idea of a slow and gradual swelling, such as the swelling of buds as the sap rises and in due course causes them to burst. It is the strongest kind of anger, and in reference to God it carries the nuance of punishment and displeasure.

⁷ For more on this, refer to the sermon on Romans 1:16b.

⁸ καὶ ἀπειθοῦσι τῇ ἀληθείᾳ πειθομένοις δὲ τῇ ἀδικίᾳ

⁹ ὀργὴ καὶ θυμὸς

The second term "indignation" carries the idea of boiling up. It refers to a passionate outburst, a vehement anger that has no end.

Those who live for themselves and as a result disobey God's Word, they receive as a reward for their actions God's disfavor! Now as before, Paul repeats his point.

Romans 2:9, "There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also to the Greek."

First, for the selfish man "there will be tribulation." The word for "tribulation" denotes literal pressure, and that of a severe kind. The verb was used of pressing the grapes in wine-making till they burst. Accordingly it referenced the pressure necessary to crush a grape. When used of a person, it denotes not minor discomfort, but acute outward suffering!

Secondly, the selfish will have distress. Literally "distress" means narrowness of space, and thus difficulty or hardship. It is used to refer to severe confinement or constriction, and hence the idea of anguish or severe inward distress. Now this "tribulation and distress" is reserved "for every soul of man [i.e. person] who does evil."

Every man on this earth who disobeys God receives a reward, tribulation and distress//wrath and indignation. Once again we see that God is not a respecter of persons. This fate awaits every sinner regardless of their religious background, "of the Jew first and also of the Greek."

Paul is saying that the punishment that a life of disobedience brings belongs to those among the people of God first, and then to the nations! Truly, to be first in salvation opportunity means being first in judgment responsibility. In the words of Peter, "For *it is* time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if *it begins* with us first, what *will be* the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?" (1 Peter 4:17)

I trust that you see that God's wrath is just! Those who do good earn eternal life. Those who do evil earn wrath and indignation. And thus when the Day of Judgment comes we can be sure that there will not be a soul who will be able to say, "Unfair!" Truly, God's Judgment is Just!

This raises a very important truth that is well neglected in our day. Based on everything we have seen we conclude that salvation is by works! Hear this carefully. The Final Judgment will be based on one's deeds.

Genesis 2:15-17, "Then the Lord God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, 'From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you shall surely die.'"

God established the basis of the relationship which mankind would forever enjoy with God. Notice that the relationship was predicated upon the obedience of Adam. That remains the same today!

2 Corinthians 5:10, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may

be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad."

Galatians 6:7-8, "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh shall from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit shall from the Spirit reap eternal life."

Look at our text again! God is speaking:

Romans 2:6, "Who will render to every man according to his deeds."

Salvation has always been granted to the one who earns it! It was this way from the beginning (Genesis 2:15-17). The fall did nothing to change it. Therefore, if a man is to stand in the presence of God he must NOT be a transgressor of the Law in any way!

Psalms 24:3-4, "Who may ascend into the hill of the Lord? And who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to falsehood, and has not sworn deceitfully."

The man who stands before God must be perfect!

Matthew 5:48, "Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

Thus if we transgress the Law just once, we are placed in the camp of those who receive God's "wrath and indignation."

James 2:10, "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all."

Romans 6:23, "...the wages of sin [the wages of transgressing the law] is death..."

From the perspective of God, salvation is based on works! The man who is not perfect cannot stand in the presence of God. And that is why again, there is no injustice in God's wrath. Those who are subject to it deserve it!

Now based on this, let me ask you a very important question: Who belong in the groups just mentioned? As Paul has parceled mankind into two different categories, who are in these groups?

Let's talk about this very important question. Paul tells us that all men reside in the group that receives wrath and indignation. Yes, all men (Romans 3:23!) Truly, left to themselves every man seeks after evil! No man "seeks after glory, honor, and immortality" no one "does good!" In fact, the Bible is quite explicit when it comes to man. As to glory, there is not a man on this earth who seeks after it. Christ asked those in His day:

John 5:44, "How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another, and you do not seek the glory that is from the one and only God?"

Truly no man is out for the glory of God!

As to God's honor, here too there is not a mortal who cares.

Romans 1:21, "For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God..."

This is the genesis of all sin. Adam and Eve were called and commissioned to honor God in and through all things. Yet they rejected that calling for a life of their own making.

Well how about immortality, you know, the imperishable Kingdom of God?

Romans 1:22-23, "Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man..."

Though Paul is referencing the immoral religious, he nevertheless has described all man. No man naturally seeks the Kingdom of God. Rather, they are about the building up of their own kingdom.

Are there any who have persevered in doing good?

Romans 3:12b, "...There is none who does good, there is not even one."

From this we must conclude that all of mankind is in the camp that receives wrath and indignation! And because of this, there has never been a man who could raise a just accusation against God that He is not fair. In the words of Jeremiah:

Lamentations 3:39, "Why should *any* living mortal, or *any* man, offer complaint in view of his sins?"

In fact in the day of judgment, mankind will not endeavor to debate the justness of God's judgment, rather we read:

Revelation 6:15-17, "And the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains; and they said to the mountains and to the rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come; and who is able to stand?'"

Are there any in the group that receive eternal life? Amazingly and originally just one man: the Lord Jesus Christ. Get this, He alone is the only One who has genuinely sought after glory, honor, and immortality and so has done good. Again, notice the testimony of God's word. As to God's glory...

John 8:50a, "But I do not seek My glory..."

That is why we read in response to Satan's temptation for Christ to worship this fallen villain.

Matthew 4:10, "Then Jesus said to him, 'Be gone, Satan! For it is written, "You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.'""

As to God's honor, Christ speaking to the Jews:

John 8:49, "Jesus answered, '...I honor my Father...'"

Unlike the Jews of Christ's day living for themselves, Christ said that His focus was the honor of God.

As to God's Kingdom:

Luke 19:9-10, "And Jesus said to him, 'Today salvation has come to this house, because he, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.'"

Christ came to establish the Kingdom of God in the hearts of man. This constituted the essence of His calling! And when it came to that which is good, Christ alone is the only one who has lived for it!

John 5:30, "I can do nothing on My own initiative. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me."

Truly, Christ alone and initially is in the second camp. In and throughout all time Christ has sought after the glory of God: His honor, righteousness, and His kingdom. And He has done this not just for a day or two, but perfectly throughout all of eternity (Psalm 45:2; 2 Corinthians 5:21)!

This then brings us to the question of the hour: If salvation is based on works and all men save one are in the camp of those who receive wrath, how can anyone be saved? Only by the grace of God (Ephesians 2:8), only by God giving you what you don't deserve! And that is NOT just salvation BUT a perfect record with regard to the Law!

Because Christ dwelt in the camp of Eternal Life, He should have never died- but He did! How is it that a man who has not violated the law could die? He died as a sacrifice for sin! He died in the place of those in the camp of the condemned. By His death He transferred His people from the camp of wrath into the camp of life! He transferred His people from disobedience to obedience.

Ephesians 4:8, "When He ascended on high, He led captive a host of captives, and He gave gifts to men."

What specifically is the gift that Christ gave to men?

Romans 5:19. "For as through one man's disobedience [Adam's] the many were made sinners [transgressors], even so through the obedience of the One [through Christ's perfect life], the many will be made righteous [without transgression]."

Well how is it that Christ's perfect life becomes our own?

Isaiah 53:4a, 5-6, "Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried... He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being *fell* upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him."

When Jesus hung on the cross, he hung there in our place. The death He died was the death which our sin deserved. The agony that He underwent was an agony intended for us! He was pierced for our

transgressions! Yet by bearing our sins on the cross and so dying in our place, we receive His life!

2 Corinthians 5:21, "He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

That is why Christ proclaimed that He fulfilled Isaiah 61:1-2.

Luke 4:18-19, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are downtrodden, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord."

This is why Paul taught:

Romans 5:21, "...as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

That's what Justification/Salvation is all about. It is NOT...

- The doing away of the law of God or the need to fulfill it!
- Changing the terms by which a man stands before God.
- The giving to the *empty* sinner purpose, fulfillment, and meaning!

RATHER, it is the judicial proclamation based upon the offering of Christ that in relation to the Law the sinner now stands perfect/right/blameless! That is what Christ's life and death secured!

Romans 5:1, "Therefore having been justified by faith [declared not guilty on account of the sacrifice of Christ on which we rely], we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

And so in the truest sense, salvation is by works! But the question is, "In whose works are you trusting? On the basis of whose righteousness will you approach the King?" Every man who relies upon their own ability to fulfill the Law will by all means perish! But every man who relies upon the work of Christ in fulfilling the law on their behalf will by all means be saved!

Thus let us cast off the misnomer that salvation is free. Christian, it has come at a great cost! If any man in the camp of wrath is to receive the gift of eternal life, it will be only on the basis of the precious offering of Christ in our stead!

1 Peter 1:18-19, "...you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb blemished and spotless, the blood of Christ."

In light of this incredible truth to the non-Christian will you remain separated from God on account of your arrogance in which you seek for your own honor, glory, and praise? Must you continue to be independent from God, living as your own man or woman?

Wait no longer. This morning bow yourselves before the throne of grace and confess your sin, ask God

to forgive you. Receive the righteousness of Christ as your own.

To the child of God, what does a Savior like this deserve? Is your Redeemer worthy of your

- Life?
- Love?
- Time?
- Devotion?

To the heart smitten by Christ's love, the answer is, "Yes and far more!" Oh God, take our life and use us as a sacrifice of praise and glory. Let us never view your will as an inconvenience to our life. But in and through all things may we live to love and to serve You!

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Feel free to visit Bethel Presbyterian Church when in Broomfield, Colorado. Bethel Presbyterian Church meets at Broomfield High School, Eagle (10th Street) and Main, Broomfield, Colorado. The telephone number of the church is 303-469-6912. The worship services are at 9:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. each Sunday. Bethel Presbyterian Church is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

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About the Preacher

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on April 25, 2010. Greg is the preacher at Bethel Presbyterian Church.