

May 30, 2021

Right Now, Counts Forever

Romans 2:5-11

Wake Up! Your Justification is by faith alone, but the faith that saves is never alone!

LTS: Gal. 6:1-10

Please take your bible and open it to Romans 2:5. Stand with me now in honor of God's word as I read Rom. 2:5-11

But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. ⁶ 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.

This week after yet another mass shooting Gov. Gavin Newsom of California asked, "What's going on in the United States of America. What's wrong with us?"

That, my friends, is the most important question of our lives: What's wrong with us? Every one of us need to answer that question. The good news is its an open book exam. But the vast majority of people in or world will never bother open the book – God's book – for the answer and will therefore perish forever.

Introduction:

In these early paragraphs of the ancient letter to the Romans, Paul has a very definite goal. He is working hard to demonstrate that both Gentiles and Jews deserve - and will experience - the full fury of God's wrath because of sin. In chapter 1 he taught us that God is already pouring out the wrath of abandonment upon the Gentiles for their sin. In chapter 2, then he turns to the Jews (the moralists) who make a show of obedience to God's law but who are just as guilty in the eyes of God as the gentiles they condemn.

The Jews were under the impression that God's patience and kindness toward them in Paul's day was evidence that they lived under God's perpetual smile. They thought for sure that

entrance into the heavenly kingdom was guaranteed them by virtue of the fact that Jewish culture was grounded in God's Law.

They viewed themselves as righteous. But while man looks at the outward appearance, the Lord sees the heart. And what God sees in the hearts of even the most conservative Jewish people is no better than what he sees in the hearts of the Gentiles.

From God's perspective, his kindness and patience toward them was merely an extended opportunity for them to repent and believe. Hence, Paul says (2:3),

Do you suppose, oh man, that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?

You see, because the Jews had a high view of their own morality – their own righteousness – they mistakenly believed that when they died, God would welcome them with open arms on the merits of their relative morality.

- A. On a personal note, I think it NO exaggeration to say that 98% of the people I have shared the gospel with have expressed this same sentiment. They believe that when they stand before God, He will see that they were relatively good, and relatively moral, relatively righteous compared to people who are obviously evil and wicked in the eyes of men. People like the most recent mass murderers in our land.
- B. My friend, Paul wants us to know that this is a very precarious and dangerous place to stand. Why? Because in the eyes of God no one is sufficiently righteous or moral. If God's chosen people, the exclusive benefactors of His covenant, His law, and His promises, are NOT considered righteous in the eyes of God, what hope does anyone else have?

So where do the Jews, who outwardly live by some semblance of God's law, stand in the eyes of God? Listen to Paul's stunning words of v. 5:

Because of your hard and impenitent heart, you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.

What's wrong with us? We are sinners, and apart from the transformative work of the H.S., all of our hearts are hard and impenitent toward God. And because of that, we are storing up wrath for the day of God's righteous judgment.

This is jolting! Paul is actually teaching that those whom we typically think of as "good" people," - "Moral" people - are actually NOT earning ANY merit with God for their relative goodness. Why? Because even though they know deep inside that they are sinners, their hearts balk at the notion of personal repentance. They refuse to humble themselves before God, agreeing with him that all their "righteousness" is but pretense and posturing.

They fail to throw themselves upon the mercy of the court. Their pride will simply not allow them to truly own their sin for what it is, agreeing that they truly deserve the just and holy wrath of God.

- A. Notice with me here that Paul describes their hearts as “hard.” The word means rigid, NOT easily bent or broken. It describes a stubborn heart, that pushes back against the charge that they are NOT really a good person in God’s eyes.
- B. True believers, however, are characterized as those who whose hearts are docile and easily broken by the Spirit of God. They have tender hearts that are under the sway of the Spirit and the world. Such people are not offended by God’s call to repentance. They actually live in a perpetual state of repentance and faith.

On the other hand, while the unregenerate person continues to believe that his/her relatively moral life is earning them merit in heaven, they are actually (5) storing up wrath for themselves on the day of wrath for themselves on the Day of Wrath when God’s righteous judgment will be revealed.

The implication here is that there is an appointed day when God’s righteous wrath will be revealed. In the O.T. it is often referred to as the great and terrible day of the Lord. In the book of Revelation, it is called the judgment. And on that day (6), God will render to each one according to his works.

Now, the important thing to note, here, is the phrase, “Each one.” In this context, Paul is not referring to unbelievers only, but all people – believers and unbelievers alike. He will judge us according to our works. But what kind of judgment will this be and how is it brought to bear upon the lives or men? That’s a good question. And as we look at the following verses we are going to discover:

- I. The Reward of Unrighteousness
- II. The Fruit of Righteousness
- III. he Necessity of Christian Works
- IV. The Application of Christian Works

I. The Reward of Unrighteousness.

1. I call this the Reward of the Unrighteous because Paul says such people are “Storing up” wrath for themselves.

2. Leon Morris helpfully explains that “in this context the word “storing up” is connected with the idea of “treasure” and means “to lay [something] up as treasure.” The person Paul has in mind, however, is in for a big shock when they arrive at the judgment seat of Christ

to discover that the only wealth they have laid up for eternity is the wrath of God. They will be rich Not in heavenly inheritance, but in righteous wrath.¹

3. What will be the reward for unrighteousness? Look with me at verses 8-9.

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,

4. This is the reward of unrighteousness. But Paul also reveals a second judgment. We might call it...

II. The Fruit of Righteousness:

1. If I had had time to go back and rethink this outline before it was printed, I probably would have identified this point as The Reward of Righteousness (I suppose I was trying to be too clever. In any case, let's read vs. 7 & 10

to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, He will give eternal life." Then he says,

- A. "Seeking for glory" here is not about self-exaltation, but a righteous expectation of future glorification when we see Jesus face to face.
- B. "Honor" is probably a reference to the honor it will be when Jesus declares "Well done good and faithful servant!"
- C. Immortality, points to the fact that even in death the believer will not die. Every believer longs for the day when death is swallowed up in immortality. We long for these things. We live for them. They are what fills us with hope in this life of struggle.

¹⁰ [There will be] "glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek.

2. Notice Paul's repeated phrase, "To the Jew first and also to the Greek. In other words, at the judgment seat of Christ, Jews and Gentiles will be judged by God according to the same standard, for there is no partiality with God. Each will be judged according to their works.

¹ Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), 115.

3. Now this raises an obvious and alarming question. How does judgment based on works fit into the context of a discussion with the believers in Rome about Justification by faith alone?

Remember, the thesis of Paul's letter is that sinners are justified by faith alone and not by the works of the law. And yet, here he is teaching us that at the Judgment, God will "render to each one according to his works."

4. I think there are two options here. And I will tell you up front that I believe the second option is the right one.

- A. Option 1: Paul means to say that eternal life would be based on perfect obedience if anyone could achieve it... but nobody can, so eternal life will not accord our works. Therefore, we must turn to the gospel and believe.²
- B. Option 2: Paul wants us to understand that God never promised that eternal life would be based on or merited by perfect obedience, but he has always commanded that there be a life of obedience to vindicate or prove the reality of faith which unites us to God as our righteousness.³ (Repeat)

3. Now, before I show from Scripture why we should embrace option 2, let me first solidify in our minds that Paul does, in fact, teach that sinners are justified (declared righteous in God's sight) by faith alone.

- Now, I don't usually ask you to turn with me to a lot of different verses, but I really want you to see these texts for yourself so that you will be persuaded by God's word.
 - A. Rom. 3:28, "For we maintain that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law."
 - B. Rom. 4:5, "But to the one who does NOT work but believes [or has faith] in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness."
 - C. Rom. 5:1 "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."
 - D. Rom. 8:33-34, Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.³⁴ Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. (8:1 "There is no condemnation...")

² Adapted from John Piper, audio sermon based on Romans 2:6-10. www.Desiringgod.org

³ Ibid

E. Can there be any doubt that Paul's gospel was the good news of Justification by faith alone?

4. Say it with me now: "The just shall live... how? By faith!"

5. And yet, Paul clearly says in our text for this morning that [God] will render to each one according to his works. In other words, while it is absolutely true that sinners are justified by faith alone, the evidence that proves or vindicates the reality of that faith consists of our good works.

Invisible faith is made visible by our works.

6. And this brings us to the 3rd point:

III. The Necessity of good works:

1. Let me start by demonstrating this teaching from the book of Romans, because I want you to see that it fits the context perfectly. Remember, Paul is writing this letter to Christians in Rome. He is not so much attempting to evangelize them but to teach them (and us) about the rich inner-working of our great salvation. How does God save us? He saves us by justification by faith alone. But how can you or anyone else have confidence that you are truly justified? Paul will teach us that the faith that saves is a faith that eagerly works or strives for the glory of God, NOT to earn salvation, but as the fruit of salvation. Let me show you this in Romans.

A. Rom. 6:22 "But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life." When a sinner is truly justified by faith alone, he becomes a willing, joyful slave of God, eager to do the Master's business. That is, we get busy serving Christ and His people. It is part of our sanctification.

B. Rom. 8:12-13, "So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. ¹³ For if you live according to the flesh you will die, [That's exactly what he is saying in chapter two!], but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

1) This passage delivers the deathblow to easy-believism. Where this doctrine of sanctification is NOT taught in the church, its easy for people to conclude that after they are born again, sin doesn't matter. But that's not right!

2) Do people actually believe that? Yes! I have mentioned before that there is a song on Christian radio that a few years ago was one of the hottest songs in the market. And there's a refrain in the middle of that song that say, "On the days I lose the battle, grace reminds me it don't matter because the cross has already won the war! I think Paul rolls over in his grave whenever that song is played! Yes, the cross has one the war! And his victory impowers his people to conquer sin and live righteously – not perfectly. We're not talking about perfection. But we are

talking about living by repentance and faith. Repentance when we sin, and faith that enables us to please the Lord.

C. Gal. 6:8–9 “For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.⁹ And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.

1) Notice that “corruption” in this verses is the opposite of “Eternal Life.”

2) Those who live according to the flesh reap corruption. But those who lives by the Spirit reaps eternal life.

D. Eph. 2:8-10. “For by grace you have been saved through faith [justification]. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast.¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”

1) Notice that salvation is said to be By Grace , through faith and FOR good works.

E. James 2:26, For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.

1) Notice, he does not say that faith without works is immature, or weak. He says, faith without works is dead.

2) What does he mean by dead? He means the same thing we all mean when we look a man in a casket whose spirit has departed from him. He is dead. He there is NO life in him.

3) In the same manner, a person who is NOT joyfully serving Christ, seeking to please Christ with his life, striving against sin, and seeking to be useful to the Master, James says that man’s profession of faith is useless and without merit. His is probably a phony faith.

2. Now don’t misunderstand. We all stumble. We all go through patches of struggle against the world, the flesh, and the devil. No one this side of heaven will attain perfection. The question is NOT one of perfection, but direction. Even Paul said Phil. 3) “Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own... one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead,¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

3. So Paul is teaching us about...

I. The Reward of Unrighteousness

II. The ~~Fruit~~ Reward of Righteousness

III. The Necessity of Christian Works

And finally,

IV. The Application of Christian Works

1. Perhaps you are a young Christian and in your heart you you're thinking, "I love the Lord and I want to serve him. Where do I start?" That's a great question!

2. I would say, Begin with the Bible.

- A. The first and most important good work you can do is get to know the Lord has He has revealed himself in His word. Discipline yourself to avail yourself of opportunities that will deepen your knowledge and love for Christ.
- B. Second, as you are reading and studying the Bible, be alert for the things that God wants you to do or how he wants you to change. Those are good works that God has prepared for you. For example,
- C. Does the bible say anything about the need for you to be to be devoted to a local church? If so, then do that.
- D. Does the bible teach you about confession of sin? Then do that. Don't do it to earn your salvation or win God's love for you. Believe me, he already loves you as much as He loves Jesus. Rejoice in that. Delight in it. Don't worry about losing him. He is Yours and you belong to him. That can never change.
- E. Don't try to do everything the bible teaches all at once. Just strive to be faithful in the next decision because you love Jesus.
- F. All of that falls under the heading of "Begin with the Bible. Beyond that, I would say,

2. Become alert to other people's needs.

- A. Of course, the first priority is your home. If you are a husband, wife, or parent, focus your good works on your home. Serve the Lord there first.
- B. Second, be on the lookout for friends, neighbor or even strangers who have a need you could meet. Then go love that person with your good works.
- C. Now, I'm sure that some who are listening right now are going to leave here thinking, "O great! Now I have to do a bunch of stuff to be a Christian. But that's not at all what Paul or I am teaching.
- D. Think of it this way. Between your salvation and your ultimate glorification, God give you the opportunity to show the world what he is like. He is gracious and compassionate. He is loving and sacrificial for the needs of others. He is holy and he is also patient and kind.

Thomas Watson, in a sermon called, "How God is his people's great reward," said:

Let this thought (God is His People's Great Reward) stir up in us a spirit of activity for God. Our head should study for Him: our hands should work for Him; our feet should run in the way of His commandments. Alas! How little is all that we can do! Our work bears no proportion with our reward. The thoughts of this reward should make us rise off the bed of

sloth and act with all our might for God. It should add wings to our prayers and weight to our alms. (1 Cor. 15:58).⁴

Why am I teaching you these things this morning? Well. Partly because it is the next set of verses in Romans. But I am also teaching you these things because Paul told me to. Some of his exhortations were specifically directed toward pastors. And in Titus 2 he writes,

Titus 2:11–14

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people,¹² training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age,¹³ waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,¹⁴ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

1. Here's how Jesus put it (Matt. 5:16) "Let your light so shine before men that they will see your good work and glorify your Father in heaven."

Wake Up! Your Justification is by faith alone, but the faith that saves is never alone!

⁴ Thomas Watson, *The Duty of Self-Denial*, (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1844), 199-200.