

## Romans, Part 9 6-12-22

### Destinies, Deeds & The Day of Judgment

Romans 2:1-11 *Therefore you have no excuse, everyone of you who passes judgment, for in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. <sup>2</sup>And we know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things. <sup>3</sup>But do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment on those who practice such things and do the same yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God? <sup>4</sup>Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance? <sup>5</sup>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, <sup>6</sup>who will render to each person according to his deeds: <sup>7</sup>to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; <sup>8</sup>but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation. <sup>9</sup>There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek, <sup>10</sup>but glory and honor and peace to everyone who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. <sup>11</sup>For there is no partiality with God.*

I am fascinated by how things make it into our national news reports. The idea of objective reporting is a fantasy because the bias begins with deciding which stories get covered. On an average day my news feed will have an article about some big economic news out of Washington, or the latest on Ukraine or the next critical election, and then, about four articles down there will be something about the marital spat of some celebrities. Someone thinks these are the most important things for me to know – or maybe it is all about what they can get me to click on – you think? Well, you already clicked on the NPC channel for today, but I thought you should know that our subject today is truly one of greatest interest –if we are willing to think and face reality.

For our second message from Romans 2, which focuses on verses 5-11, we begin by noting that humans, all of us, will someday face a judgment which will be followed by one of two permanent destinies. Nothing could be plainer in our text. Verse 9 especially says there will be distress for some and glory for others. No notion here of persons being eternally unconscious. They will either be having a

good day for all eternity or a bad day. And this is undoubtedly the teaching of Scripture in every portion of it. Jesus, in the judgement day scene in Matthew 25, divides the human population between sheep and goats. The sheep have it good and the goats do not. So, it is in Romans 2. The eternal destinies are described with various terms. For one, those terms are *wrath, indignation, tribulation* and *distress*. For the other, the terms are: *life, glory, honor, immortality* and *peace*. Not much overlap is there? Not any. Very different destinies and only two.

Now, that said, we could labor to show you that there are variations within the two categories. Among those who are damned there will be degrees of distress. Among the redeemed there will be degrees of bliss. Scripture speaks here of those storing up wrath – sort of wrath hoarders, which means that the more they give themselves to sin, the sadder their eternity becomes. And Jesus spoke often of storing up treasures in heaven. So, we recognize that among the happy some are happier and among the sad, some are sadder. You can store up treasure or judgment. Which are you doing? And while I am asking questions, are you facing honestly the temporariness of your life in this world? Children, this is important for you. Someday you are going to die. Most likely after many decades but it may be when you are nine or nineteen. And when you die you will either enter eternal joy with God or go away under his eternal anger. God has given Jesus to die for us so that we may trust Him and have eternal life. Do you care about this? Listen carefully today and ask your mom or dad to help you be sure you will go to heaven. And teens, please don't leave here thinking you will delay dealing with eternity when you are old. Every day we read of students dying suddenly. You can't afford to put this off. And you who are young adults, oh the distractions of this world! So many ways to pull your mind off the weighty issues of eternity. So many great restaurants and movies and sports and games. Wake up before it is too late and prepare yourself not for retirement someday, but judgment someday. And then, those in the senior years – for you the day is likely closer. This last year, I got more spam phone calls than ever, from all these nice people wanting to help me prepare for Medicare and social security. How nice of them! But that season of life may last twenty years? Maybe much less – what is that in comparison to the eternity of heaven or hell? Revelation 7:16-17 *They will hunger no longer, nor thirst anymore; nor will the sun beat down on them, nor any heat;<sup>17</sup> for the Lamb in the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and will guide them to springs of the water of life; and God will wipe every tear from their eyes.* This is the blessedness of the redeemed, as opposed to weeping and gnashing of teeth for

the lost. These are the eternal destinies. Only two and they are as different as, well, as heaven and hell.

Next thing to note from our passage is that we have one perfect judge. Two permanent destinies, one perfect judge who is the Lord God almighty. Paul tells us several things about his judgment. First, he calls it righteous judgment. Hallelujah! Don't you long for that? Justice is one of the yearnings of the human heart. We get it only in small measure in this world, but when time meets eternity we get a perfect judge with perfect judgment that will be beyond questioning. In this world we wonder about our justice system – how righteous is it? Was the OJ verdict in 95 legitimate? Did Derek Chauvin get what was right in his trial two years back? Of course, we see the wicked getting off frequently and sometimes the innocent are condemned. It is grievous and sad. But the eternal verdicts of God will be indisputable. He is a judge of perfect and complete knowledge whose judgments flow out of his righteousness. So, as you wonder about certain individuals who have died - maybe you are unsure where they stood with the Lord. Many times, we don't know if we will see them in glory – but we always know the Judge of all the earth will do right. In that we may find comfort.

A quick note on verse 11 – we will cover that next time too. But this is the verse that says there is no partiality with God. That is a proposition I sometimes hear pressed beyond its limits. The point here is that God does not favor some ethnic groups over others. Obviously, that was news for the Jews, but our Lord's judgements will be relative to individuals. His favor may shine on one more than another. That is His choice, but He tells us that race is not a consideration so that in the eternal choir there will be those of every tribe and tongue and people.

The only other thing to note about the perfect judge is that He has set a day for ultimate judgment. As we have seen He does dispense judgments in partial, temporary ways in this life. But, at the watershed between time and eternity there is THE day of judgment. This day is associated in Scripture with the return of the Lord Jesus who is the Judge. It is sometimes called *the day*, or *that day*. Paul said, in his speech in Athens, that God Acts 17:31 *has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead*. That day is the most momentous day of future history and it will impact all of us as we all will stand before the judgment seat of Christ. The most important thing you can ever do is prepare your soul for that day and help others prepare as well.

On now to our third and last point from our passage – that is the two distinct types of humans. Two destinies, one judge. But to go with the two destinies, we

have two distinct types of persons. One experiences the eternity of joy – call these the redeemed. The others experience the eternity of regret. Call these the lost. Much of our passage explains the difference between these two persons – the redeemed and the lost. And, before I go over them, please consider that the difference is not found in any kind of group identity. Paul is writing to Jews who thought they would get by due to their ethnic heritage. But he says, “not so.” It is not your religious affiliation, or your race or your family or your victim group that will be the basis of judgment. Paul says it is behavior and values. That is character. Like so many other places in Scripture, verse 6 says that judgment is according to our deeds. This is the famous vision of MLK who longed for a day when people are judged by the content of their character. Romans 2 teaches that is the divine judgment on the last day.

So, let’s go through these descriptions of our two types, starting with the lost. There are several terms used to describe both groups, but I am going to sum them up with two each. First, for the lost – these are those who are stubborn and unrepentant. *5 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.* It is interesting to me that Paul says that it is your deeds that count, but then he goes to addressing the matter of heart disposition, of inward values. Why? Because there is an inextricable connection between those. A hard heart, a stubborn heart will show up in lifestyle choices. That kind of heart will manifest in sin, maybe different sins depending on your context, but it all leaves you in a bad way on the great day. For this first one I combine *stubborn* and *unrepentant* because I see them as basically the same. It is a hard heart, that does not break under the conviction of sin. It is a heart that refuses to own one’s guilt or submit to a Lord. The word, by the way, the Greek term, simply means “hard.” It is the term from which we get *sclerosis* which is a pathological hardening of tissue as in *sclerosis of the liver*. Bodily hardening is bad. Spiritual hardening is worse. God said of Israel in Ezekiel 3:7 (NLT) *The whole lot of them are hard-hearted and stubborn.* Later the promise of the new covenant comes through the prophet and it is a promise of a changed heart, a softened heart. The New Testament speaks many times of hard hearts. Hebrews warns believers not to harden their hearts. Hard things are not malleable. They are not sensitive, but a sensitive heart is exactly what we must have in order to hear the gospel with a saving response. So, this is a major difference between the redeemed and the lost, right? The redeemed

are given a new heart that responds to the Spirit's call with repentance and faith. The forever-lost just stay indifferent or hostile to the word of God.

Then the next term used of the lost is *selfish*. The NAS says, *selfishly ambitious*. The NLT says they *live for themselves*. This is so instructive. The basic disposition of sinners is to seek their own advancement as they understand that. The big "I" is on the throne and the center of the universe. This is our natural condition. Every child is like this. Good parenting can teach them to subjugate those tendencies, but only a spiritual overhaul by a mighty Savior can truly change the disposition. But thank God the redeemed are different and they are so because of this great work of God we call rebirth that leads to conversion. Remember II Corinthians 5, which we will come back to in a few says this in verse 15 *He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf*. This describes a critical transformation that the lost never experience. As a result, they are left to live for themselves. It doesn't mean they may not be nice – but it tells you that their goals are all self-interested at heart, even if they may appear noble and good. It is their own perceived self-interests that guide them. So, verse 8 also says *they do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness*. Well, I find that fascinating. They don't obey the truth. Facts and reality don't shape their choices. They feel no obligation to the truth. Their allegiance is to self which leads to many unrighteous choices. What is truly fascinating is that contrast of truth and unrighteousness. You may think that truth would be parallel to lies or falsehood – but no. This is something Paul wants us to get. Back in chapter one he said that sinners suppress the truth in what? They suppress it in unrighteousness. We think people follow lies, but it is more accurate to say they follow their lusts. They want to avoid pain and rejection and so they say whatever the powerful persons, whoever those are, require. They want to fulfill their lusts and so they adopt supposedly intelligent positions that support their lusts. If evolution or chance explains the world then there is no holy God out there stopping me from having all the women I want. You see? Their views are not determined by honest analysis or research but by their lusts that lead them around by the nose and keep them from loving and following the truth. The center of their world is self. No openness to repent, no interest in the truth. These are the lost. Learn from their example what not to be and do, what to turn from.

And what shall we turn toward? The description of the redeemed. Our two main terms for these are – first of all – They do good, with perseverance. Doing good is mentioned in verses 6 and 10. Not a radical concept. Quite basic. Redeemed people will be those doing good – as God defines the good, something

done according to His word, out of His strength, for His glory. But also, notice that it mentions perseverance. Oh! So many there are who have done good here and there, who have had seasons of doing good – for whatever reason. But the redeemed person has an inward disposition to do good in all seasons, in all contexts because this, we know, is the will of our Lord. Jesus said, Peter said, Paul said that it is those who endure or persevere to the end who are the saved. Have you persevered? Some of you have – gloriously, walked with Christ for fifty years. Praise the Lord! I Peter 1 says that such perseverance increases your assurance, your confidence, you have proven you aren't just a flash in the pan. The winds and the rain have pelted your house and it has stood. For those of you who are younger, these are the ones to aspire to emulate. Redeemed persons will persevere in doing good, by the grace of the Lord.

Then too, the redeemed will seek after heavenly things. Our text uses several terms – glory, honor, eternal life. This is what awaits us in the blessed kingdom of God's son. Leon Morris writes this in his commentary. *Their minds are not set on material prosperity or the like.... They are set on glory and honor and immortality...The bent of their lives is toward heavenly things.* I should note this is too seldom true of me. Even at my age I am thinking too much about my future in this world in comparison to my eternity. But redeemed people trust the promise of Christ concerning life eternal. We know this life is short in comparison. So, we seek glory – not glory from men like a few get in this life. We want to reflect God's glory and hear His benediction. We want honor from our Master and King. That's the ultimate. And that will show up in our choices and behaviors as we take the harder paths, the wiser paths set before us by Jesus. There is a foolish old saying that certain folks are so heavenly minded they are of no earthly good. No-no-no. The truth is that most people are so earthly minded they are of no heavenly good. But those who are the redeemed are those who set their minds on things above, and then, because of that, they are free to focus on doing much good in this world. They believe in a life after death that gives meaning to this life and leads them to lay their interests down for those of others and say to God, *thy will, not my will be done.* I long for us to be more heavenly-minded as a people. To speak more of heaven, to sing more of heaven. It would do us a world of good and lead us to do good in the world.

Alright – as we hit the home stretch here we need to deal with a struggle some of you are having. It seems that Romans 2 presents a basis for judgment that is contradicted in later chapters of Romans. We know Paul is going to teach us soon that we are made right with God by grace, through faith, not by our works.

Why does Paul here seem to be saying things contrary to the gospel? Good questions. I have them myself. Maybe I have some answers – at least this approach helped me. I pray it will help you as well and lead us all into greater clarity in our understanding of faith and works.

First thing to get is that our judgment will be according to our deeds, our works, our faithfulness or lack thereof to Jesus. This suggests that there are degrees of punishment and degrees of reward. Many in evangelical churches get confused on this point, but it is assumed in Scripture as we have said earlier today. But please understand, the major division of humanity is over where we are with Christ. Those in Christ, those linked by faith to Him, are judged unto their eternal reward. All believers face an eternity of joy, but somehow, some way I don't comprehend, the more faithful brothers and sisters will be closer to the throne, have bigger mansions or something like that. Jesus promises greater rewards for some at judgment. It is a judgment of grace, but according to works. Charles Hodge says that wicked persons are punished on account of their works and according to their works, but the redeemed are awarded according to their works, but on account of Jesus.

Paul's language here can confuse us if we take the description of the redeemed as a description of how they are saved. The redeemed are justified by the blood of Jesus, as we put faith in His name. That is all. That is the basis for our acceptance with God. But, if you ask me to describe redeemed persons, doing good, seeking heavenly things, and so forth, these will be part of the answer. By the way, repenting is part of the answer. Redeemed persons repent of their sins. It is not that they have no sins. They do, but they turn from them, renounce them and strive to live a holy life. These are marks of redeemed persons. Why? Because the Savior who redeems them by His grace, also changes them into His image. The gospel does not come into a life and leave it under the dominion of sin. It comes in the power of the Holy Spirit. It produces the obedience of faith. The obedience of faith – gospel holiness. You know Ephesians 2. There in verse 8 we read 8-9 *For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; <sup>9</sup>not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.* So, clear enough, our salvation is not on account of our works, our personal goodness or religious deeds. But what does the very next verse say? 10 *For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.* In God's plan, we are saved by faith alone, but not a faith that is alone. We are not saved by works, but we also are not saved without them. They

flow forth as the fruits of repentance and faith which are gifts of the Spirit who changes us. Remember II Corinthians 5:17 (NLT) *anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!* And that new life does bring forth those fruits that Paul mentions, that describe those redeemed by the pardoning and transforming grace of Jesus Christ to whom belongs glory forever.

We finish with this simple expression – We are not saved by works, but we are not saved without them. Some miss the gospel and teach that our works lead to salvation. The Bible affirms instead that our salvation which comes to us freely leads to good works. Got that? Works lead to salvation? NO! Salvation leads to works? YES. God's plan. God's glory. God's power. Let's pray to the one who works within us to will and to work for His good pleasure.