

ROMANS

GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS REVEALED

RIGHT NOW COUNTS FOREVER

Text: Romans 2:6-11

Main preaching point: God's judgment is impartial.

INTRODUCTION:

The certainty of final judgment forms the frame within which the New Testament message of saving grace is set. Like His Master, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Apostle Paul spoke of it with vivid detail. In this first section of Romans, the epistle that contains Paul's fullest exposition of the Gospel (*Rom.2:5-16*), Paul spells out this critical doctrine—BIG, plain, and straight, as Dr. Adrian Rogers used to say.

At its core, **the doctrine of judgment** points us to the attribute of God's justice. When it was revealed to Abraham that the sky would be opened and fire would pour down out of heaven and lick up Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham asked, "*Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly*" (*Gen.18:25*). Abraham was not challenging God, but declaring what He knew to be true of Him. If there is no judgment upon men and nations for their sins, then God is not a just God as the Bible claims Him to be, and therefore not perfect in His being.

Before the world was plunged into the lost and cursed state in which we see it today, the first doctrine or teaching the devil opposed was *the doctrine of judgment* (*Gen.3:1-7*). Why would Satan so strongly oppose the doctrine of judgment? While no one would dare pretend to know what is in the dark mind of the Evil One, the Scriptures shed light on several facts as to why the enemy of our souls desires to keep men in the dark about God's judgment.

- To reject God's judgment is to be ignorant of God's nature.
- To reject judgment is to deny the truthfulness of God's Word. Scripture is replete with declarations and revelation about the judgment of God. Hebrews 9:27, "*It is appointed for men to die once, and after this comes judgment*" (*Cf. Eccl.12:14*).
- To reject judgment is to deny biblical history.
- To reject judgment is to deny the cross of Christ.

For it was there on Calvary's hill that God poured out His wrath for sinners, demonstrating "*His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners [polluted, wayward, indifferent, crooked], Christ died for us.*" He did not merely offer forgiveness—He had to die. "*Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him*" (*Rom.5:8-9*). The doctrine of judgment matters.

"When Christ comes again and history is completed, all humans of all ages will be raised for judgment and will take their place before Christ's judgment seat. The event is unimaginable, no doubt, but human imagination is no measure of what a sovereign God *can* and *will* do."¹

Why does God so graciously reveal so much about His judgment? *Because the knowledge of future judgment is always a summons to present repentance.* Only the penitent will be prepared for judgment when it comes. And that's Paul's aim as he explains to us why everyone needs the Gospel of Christ.

REVIEW:

Last week, I outlined five truths about judgment that are seen in verses 1-16. Let me review them with you.

1. God's judgment will be *according to truth.* (vv.1-5)
2. God's judgment will be *according to works.* (vv.6-11)
3. God's judgment will be *tempered by the light of revelation.* (vv.11-12)
4. God's judgment will be *according to revelation and conscience.* (vv.13-15)
5. God's judgment will be *administered by Jesus Christ.* (v.16)

We opened the first truth last week, and this is so important for us that it is best to take our time and understand them rather than rush and not grasp what is being said. Today, let's confine our thoughts only to the second one. To recapitulate what we learned last week...

EXPOSITION:

A. GOD'S JUDGMENT WILL BE ACCORDING TO TRUTH. (vv.1-5)

It will not be according to *hearsay, intentions, or the changing, imperfect standards of men.* It will be based upon reality—truth. Paul advances his argument by addressing the person who thinks they will escape judgment because they disapprove of or deny the sins listed in Chapter 1. Paul says, "**Therefore you have no excuse...**"

- **In verses 1-2**—Paul explains...**You practice the same things** (just a different manifestation and extent). ¹"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. ²And we know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things."

You've been weighed in the balances and found guilty of the very same sin.

- **In verse 3**—Paul explains...**You will face the same judgment**—³But 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?

This is a rhetorical question anticipating a negative answer—no! You will face the same judgment.

- **In verse 4**—Paul explains...**You resist the same kindness**—⁴Or 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?

¹ J.I. Packer, *Concise Theology: A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1993), 259.

- **In verse 5**—Paul explains...**You store up the same wrath**⁵ 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.

In other words, you—Mr. or Mrs. Moralist—are in *the same boat as these people in Chapter 1*.

Now, in verses 6-10, Paul states—**you will be judged by the same principle**. And what is that principle? This is what Paul explains now.

B. GOD’S JUDGMENT WILL BE ACCORDING TO WORKS. (vv.6-11)

He begins by laying down...

- 1. The principle established**—What is the principle, the standard, the rule, or the doctrine that each person will be judged by? The principle applies to *believer* and *unbeliever*, *Christian* and *non-Christian*, *saved* and *lost*.

⁶who WILL RENDER TO EACH PERSON ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS:

This is a direct quote from Psalm 62:12 and Proverbs 24:12. The reason Paul quotes this from the Old Testament is to show us that it has always been this way. It is not a New Testament idea only. It is a *timeless principle*. Verse 6 is rich. Last week we briefly touched on verse 6, so let me open it again.

- a. There is a certainty to God’s judgment. “Who...”** refers to God. The antecedent is found in the last word of verse 5. The Executor of this judgment is *God Himself*. The word “**will**” speaks to the *certainty* of this judgment. God will render this judgment with absolute conviction. To “**render**” means *to pay as wages or to give a recompense for work done*. If I came over to mow your grass bright and early tomorrow morning, the payment you would give me would not be a gift. I worked hard for it. It would be a wage, a recompense, or a payment for what is due. Paul is saying here that there will be a payday someday—a payoff. Next, notice Paul speaks to...
- b. There is a universality to God’s judgment. “Who will render to each person....”** To each person makes this *personal*; *recompense is an individual matter*. It is not a collective experience. Every single person will be recompensed—whether you are a believer or an unbeliever. Paul is saying, “We all need to pay attention to this.” There is a *certainty* of God’s judgment. A *universality* of God’s judgment. And finally,
- c. There is an accountability to God’s judgment.** It will be “**according to his deeds.**” *According to* means *in portion to his deeds*. It will not be based on *what we intended to do, what we thought about doing, or what we wanted to do*. It will be based on what we actually did. Works are important. They are the truest outward expression of what the person is deep down. *In the believer, they are the expressions of his faith (James 2:14ff). In the unbeliever, they are the expressions of unbelief*. What this means for all of us is *your works, not your profession, are of the greatest significance, for God will render to each person according to those works (Job 34:11; Prov.24:12; Jer.17:10)*.

Although salvation is *all of grace*, judgment will be *according to works*. Again, this applies to both the believer and the unbeliever.

Let me pull over and park for a moment—to examine this with you. The Bible clearly explains that *God keeps impeccable records of every person's life*. Every deed, every action, every word, every thought, every motive of every person in the entire human race in the history of the world is being recorded.

It is as though there is an invisible recorder hung around each of our necks. It records *the things we think, desire, and say to and about others and what we do*. Then, at the last day, God the Judge will take the recorder off your neck and say, "I will be completely fair—I will simply play this tape and judge you on the basis of what your own thoughts, words, and actions say."

God has it all recorded in His book. Let me prove it to you.

- **John 5:28-29**—Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice,²⁹ and will come forth; those who did the good *deeds* to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil *deeds* to a resurrection of judgment.
- **Matthew 16:27**—For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and WILL THEN REPAY EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS.
- **Revelation 20:11-15**—Then I saw a great [power] white [purity] throne [purpose] and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them.¹² And I saw the dead [spiritually], the great [significant in position] and the small [insignificant not well known], standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is *the book of life*; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, *according to their deeds*.¹³ And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one *of them* according to their deeds.¹⁴ Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire.¹⁵ And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. (Cf. Rev.22:12)

Not all judgment will be the same for unbelievers. So much sin, so much judgment. It will not be the same for everyone—for Jesus plainly taught that there will be degrees of punishment for sin in hell (*Matt.11:20-24*). So, the principle is established for unbelievers. But there is a judgment for believers, based on their deeds as well, at the judgment seat of Christ:

- **Romans 14:10-12**—But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God.¹¹ For it is written, "AS I LIVE, SAYS THE LORD, EVERY KNEE SHALL BOW TO ME, AND EVERY TONGUE SHALL GIVE PRAISE TO GOD."¹² So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God.
- **2 Corinthians 5:10**—For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

As believers, we, too, shall stand before the Lord. We, too, shall have our life and our ministry examined and scrutinized by the Lord. *There will be a judgment for the believer's works, and rather than their being degrees of punishment, there will be degrees of reward for the believer*. All this will be based upon how strategically and purely we invested our lives in the things and purposes of God. We will never stand in judgment for our sins. Romans 8:1 says, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." But we will stand in judgment for our deeds, and there will be a scrutiny for how we *invested our time, treasures, and talents* for the things of God.

This is the point Paul is establishing—it is a principle that applies to *the unbeliever* and the *believer*. What is Paul saying? The principle that he is establishing is that *every person will face judgment*.

Verse 6 is *the principle established*. Now he proceeds in verses 7-10 with...

- 2. The application applied**—Paul proceeds to divide those being judged into two classes. He uses a literal device called the *A, B, B, A* argument. *Believer* verse 7, *unbeliever* verse 8, *unbeliever* verse 9, back to *believer* verse 10—*A, B, B, A*. It is a *chiastic* argument.

He begins with the believer—how do we know one is saved? Look at their life. All these characteristics presuppose *the new birth*—with new direction and new affections. These are the signs of a Christian.

⁷to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life;

- **They persevere in doing good**—Paul’s word for “**perseverance**” denotes an active, manly fortitude. It is used of the soldier who, in the thick of a hard battle, gives as much as he gets; he is not dismayed by the blows he receives but fights to the end. Jesus said in Matthew 24:13, “*But the one who endures to the end, he will be saved.*” It means to continue with constancy and steadfastness throughout the entirety of one’s Christian life. It is well said that “a faith that fizzles before the finish had a flaw from the first” (Cf. *Heb.3:14; Col.1:21-23; 1 John 2:19*).
- **They live for God’s glory**—“**seek for glory and honor and immortality....**” That is, they are full of desire for God. The verb “**seek for**” is in the present tense, which means *they are habitually, continually seeking heavenly things*. Their minds are set on things above, not material prosperity, religiosity, or worldliness, but the bent of their lives is toward God’s glory. God’s honor and immortality. God’s glory speaks of glorification with Christ. God’s honor is the special honor that God bestows on those who are faithful—“*Well done, good and faithful servant*” (*Matt.25:21*). “**Immortality**” means life after death and refers to *resurrection life*.

All three should be taken as the objects of the believer’s search. The linking of glory, honor, and immortality points to a search that is not done from selfish motives. It springs from a new heart and being a justified by faith person. Paul says, in Romans 5:1-2, “*Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ²through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God.*”

- **They have eternal life.** This word for “**eternal**” means *pertaining to an age to come*. It is a life that will not end—but it is characterized by much more than longevity. It is a life of a special quality—a life lived in the very presence of God now. You don’t have to wait to experience it because it is a gift to those who know and believe on Jesus Christ. Eternal life begins the moment we are born again, but this is a reference to the full and final realization of our salvation. Jesus said in John 17:3, “*This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.*”

1 John 5:11-13—And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. ¹²He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life.

¹³These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.

This is how you can know what a Christian is. You look at what he does. He is always seeking to honor God. He is seeking to strive to please the Lord. They don't always do it, but they persevere in doing God. They do not give up. They are not focused on the things of this world. They are looking for something else—another city. R.C. Sproul wrote a monthly column in his *Tabletalk Magazine* entitled, *“Right Now Counts Forever.”* And it does. Do you believe it? Do these things describe your mindset? Your ambition? Your testimony? Your lifestyle?

In verse 8, Paul turns to *those who do not seek the things of God*. Verse 7 is the application to those who are *believers*. Verse 8 is the application to those who are *unbelievers*. The word **“but”** marks the contrast.

⁸ but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation. ⁹ *There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek.*

How do you know that a person merely professes faith but is really not right with God and born again? Verse 8 says,

- **They are selfishly ambitious.** The words **“selfishly ambitious”** only appear five times in Paul's letters and twice in James. The main idea is that you have never died to self, and therefore you live for yourself. It means you still do what you want to do, how you want to do it, when you want to do it, and with whom you want to do it. Sum total: You are not living for Christ. You are chiefly motivated by self-seeking as opposed to seeking God. You still live for self. Just in case you are still confused, Paul identifies them with a negative and a positive to clarify.
- **They do not obey the truth.** This is in the present tense. They keep on not obeying the truth. It is a big-picture snapshot of their lives. It is not a movie with every situation at every moment. Because sometimes they appear to be obeying. But it's not the pattern of their lives. It is not the delight, the desire, or the direction of their lives. They are unwilling to submit their lives to the authority of God's Word. They lack teachability. They reject the truth—so how can they obey it? They have put themselves in the opposite camp—so how can they give their allegiance to God?
- **They obey unrighteousness.** Paul will elaborate on this in chapter 6 of Romans when he explains that the way you can tell who your Master is, is by whom you obey. You either obey sin resulting in death, or obedience (meaning Christ), resulting in righteousness (*Rom.6:16-17*). There is no middle category. This is strong medicine. Can you receive it? Will you receive it?

What will unbelievers receive for not obeying the truth? Look back at the end of verse 8 again—**“wrath and indignation.”** This is the payback God gives to those who live their own lives and do their own thing. **Wrath...indignation...tribulation...distress** (*vv.8b-9a*). That's the payback for **“every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek”** (*v.9b*). Just as the Gospel was given first to the Jew and then to the Gentile—*judgment will be given first to the Jew and then to the Gentile*. Why? Because they have had greater revelation and, therefore, greater accountability.

These are the wages they have earned. This is the paycheck they will receive.

It is the same wrath Paul spoke of in Chapter 1:18 and Chapter 2:5. **Wrath** (*orge*) has the idea of a swelling, such as the swelling of buds as the sap rises and, in due course, causes them to burst.

Intense like the snorting of the nostrils of a war horse or raging bull. Heated divine passion! It is the violent anger of God. Boiling up and bubbling up—this is the holiness of God, who strongly reacts toward what is contrary to and does not conform with His character and His Word.

Before closing out this chiastic argument, he comes back to the believer. *Believer* verse 7, *unbeliever* verse 8, *unbeliever* verse 9, and *believer* verse 10 to complete the argument. It is an *inclusio* where you finish the argument where you began the argument. In other words, you start by saying something, then you say other things, and then you come back to where you started. It is a very effective teaching method. Once again, note the conjunction **“but”** marks a contrast.

¹⁰ but glory and honor and peace to everyone who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

Glory, honor, and peace combine to point believers to *a totality of bliss and blessing*. It encompasses both *the outward state* and *the inward state*. **Peace** is more than a peace of mind, but a peace with God. It is more than tranquility of soul, but the promise of total acceptance and reconciliation with God. And here, Paul highlights, *circles in red ink*, or double underlines the point in verse 11. *God's judgment is impartial*.

¹¹ For there is no partiality with God.

REVIEW:

The principle established—God's judgment will be according to works.
The application applied—It applies to the believer and the unbeliever.

3. **Now, the explanation restated—“for there is no partiality with God.”** He will judge both the believer and the unbeliever. The word for **“partial”** means *favoritism*. It is made up of two words meaning “to receive” and “face.” Thus, it signifies *giving someone a gracious reception*. But in the New Testament, it is always used in a bad sense of showing partiality or preferring someone without good reason (*James 2:1, 9*).

In the New Testament world where Paul lived, *justice was not a given*. In fact, the opposite would be expected. No one expected a judge to treat a rich, important person in the same way as a poor insignificant person.

But Paul concludes by saying—you can expect this evenhanded, divine justice with God.

- **Deuteronomy 10:17**—For the LORD your God is the God of gods and the Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God who does not show partiality nor take a bribe.
- **Acts 10:34-35**—Opening his mouth, Peter said:
“I most certainly understand *now* that God is not one to show partiality, ³⁵ but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him.

He will not weigh things in favor of *the rich or poor*. He will not favor *any one nation over another*—be it Jew or Greek, America or any other nation. In the end, we can rely on the fact that justice will be done.

CONCLUSION:

SO WHAT? We don't need to answer, *what does this mean for others*, but *what does this mean FOR you and me?*

Without judgment, *salvation has no meaning*.

Without the reality of God's present and future wrath, *the cross is emptied of its glory*.

Paul's concern is to show that *the ground on which we stand, whether Jew or Gentile, religious or irreligious, rule-breaking or rule-keeping, is level*. All face judgment, all deserve wrath, and all need the Gospel of Christ!

We cannot appreciate who Christ is and what He has done unless we have first acknowledged who we are. Charles Simeon, the great preacher of the 18th and 19th centuries, put it,

"There are but two objects that I have ever desired...to behold; the one, is my own vileness; and the other is, the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ: and I have always thought that they should be viewed together."²

- **QUALITY COUNTS.** Not quantity, but reality. (1 Cor.3:10-17)
- **WORKS MATTER.** Obedience is very important to God. (James 2:14-20)
- **JESUS SAVES.** Have you committed your life to Christ? Have you come to rest your whole soul's weight and trust in Him? Are you living for Jesus? Do you love Him?

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Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are from the New American Standard Bible: 1960, 1962, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1975, 1977, 1995 by the Lockman Foundation.

² As quoted in John Piper, *The Roots of Endurance* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2002, 108).