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A1428 – July 13, 2014 – Romans 2:5-11

The Justice Of God

Last week we closed by looking at repentance in Romans 2:4 and how it is God's kindness in this present era that is designed to lead men to repentance. What is repentance? Repentance is *μετανοια* and means "a change of mind." It does not mean what so many think it means, "doing penance for sins" or "turning from sins." It's really unfortunate that the English translation of this Greek word is "repentance." It would be much clearer if it was translated "a change of mind." What the change your mind about is defined by the context; it could be sin, it could be selling your birthright, it could be God, it could be anything, it just depends on the context. So make a conscious decision in your mind not to read into the English translation "repentance" the idea of "doing penance for sins" or "turning from sins" - it simply does not mean that. It has to do with a change in the thinking patterns in one's mind. God gave men a mind and the conscience judges according to the standards in one's mind. These judgments either approve or condemn one's own decisions or another's. Paul is saying in Romans 2:1 that when a man condemns another for an action that he himself does then he is self-condemned. In 2:2 we know that his judgment by God is according to truth. In 2:3, however, he is living under the delusion that he will actually escape the judgment of God. His reasoning presumably is because he has gotten away with his hypocrisy for his entire life. Living in a period of history characterized by the ethics of common grace men are lured into the faulty thinking that the ethics of judgment will never arrive. They thus think they can and will escape even though they know what they are doing is sinful. In 2:4 it becomes evident that they are taking lightly the riches of God's kindness in not bringing in the ethics of judgment. If they were to take it seriously they would recognize that the period of common grace is designed to lead them to repentance prior to the Day of Judgment. We looked at three additional passages that parallel this passage in showing that there are long periods of common grace followed

by short periods of judgment. What is going to happen in the future has happened before in the past. Before the global flood the people lived in a period of common grace. They sinned, and apparently got away with it. They wrongly concluded that the ethics of common grace would continue forever, that there could not possibly be any major interruptions to history. When God called Noah to preach to the world that these ethics were coming to an end and the ethics of final judgment were about to ensue the world did not listen. When the doors of the ark closed they were set for judgment and suddenly they were all destroyed by the waters of the flood, they did not escape; men, women and children, they all died. Only eight people heeded God's warning and escaped the judgment. So there is historic precedent that God gives men extensive periods of common grace but then the grace comes to an end and judgment follows. Since the cross of Christ we have been living in a time of common grace. Men sin and apparently, from the standpoint of final judgment, they get away with it. Yet verse 4 is implying that the grace is coming to an end and judgment will soon fall. Before that time comes God is allowing men to repent concerning Him and their ability to escape His judgment. Now is the hour of grace but the world needs to be warned that His grace is running out and today is the day to repent because when the day of grace ends the judgment will come and they will not escape.

So I'm defining repentance as "a change of thinking." What in the context do they need to have a change of thinking about? Verse 3, their ability to escape the judgment of God. They suppose they will escape; they will not escape. They need to change their thinking about that. God's kindness and tolerance and patience is designed to lead them to this change of mind. So take note of the fact that the repentance in Romans 2:4 is a pre-salvation repentance that is preparatory for faith in Christ. It's not the equivalent of faith in Christ, as it is in some passages, but it is preparing the way for faith in Christ; it is orienting them to look seriously at God and take stock of their position before Him. I think in all of Paul's sermons in the Book of Acts; chapters 13, 14 and 17 he does this. He does not start with Jesus. He starts by talking to them about God. This is where a lot of evangelism falls short. People are so anxious to jump straight to Jesus and often that is putting the cart before the horse. Of course, if a person is asking as the Philippian jailer was, "What must I do to be saved?" then of course, we give them the gospel and tell them to have faith in Christ. But if a person is not asking that question then they see no need to be saved. So what you are doing by reminding them of God is you are

getting them to look at Him with whom they have to do and that produces conviction and when they're under conviction and looking for alleviation from the guilt then that's when you preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and faith in Him.

So I am taking the repentance in 2:4 as pre-salvation. Not everybody agrees with that but Paul is so accustomed to talking about faith; he rarely uses repentance, but he does here and he does in Acts 17:30 and in both cases he's addressing unbelievers, telling them to repent. And there's nothing in either passage about Jesus Christ. Both passages are about God. So I'm taking repentance in this passage as a change in the thinking of an unbeliever about God that is preparatory for having faith in Christ. They need to have a change of mind about their supposition that they will escape the judgment of God. In other words, God works with unbelievers.

You may not be accustomed to thinking in terms of God's pre-salvation work with unbelievers but it is an undeniable revelation of God in Scripture that all three members of the Trinity are at work in people's lives before they are saved. And that the work is necessary for them to come to faith so that they are saved. Let's take a few examples. First, what work does the Spirit do for unbelievers? John 16:8-11 says that He convicts them of sin, righteousness and judgment. Do you think that anyone would ever come to faith apart from that work of the Holy Spirit? No way. The Holy Spirit's pre-salvation work of convicting is necessary for them to come to faith. Second, what work does the Father do for unbelievers? John 6:44-45 says that He draws them through teaching. Do you think anyone would ever come to faith apart from the drawing work of the Father through teaching of the word? Think again. No one ever has. Third, what work does the Son do for unbelievers? John 12:32 says that He draws them through the influence of His cross work. Do you think anyone ever came to salvation apart from being influenced by Christ's cross work? No. Because of these pre-salvation works of the Trinity people come to salvation. And I don't claim to have it all worked out, it's very complex how He does it. Nobody understands all the details and intricacies but I see throughout Scripture that He works with unbelievers and I see one of His works here in verse 4. He delays judgment as a revelation of His kindness giving in order to lead them to repentance which will pave the way for them to have faith in Christ. "Ironsides (*Except Ye Repent*) emphasizes that one must repent in his overall attitude toward God in order to have genuine

saving faith in Christ.”ⁱ So in this passage don’t confuse the two and understand your role in working with unbelievers as the apostle Paul did. He works through us, just like 2 Cor 4 and 5 and many other passages say. You are a vessel carrying a wonderful treasure that people desperately need so be ready to be used.

Now we come to verses 5-11 and this is describing the judgment that they are heading for if they don’t repent. It’s their failure to repent that is blocking their ability to have faith in Christ so as to avoid this coming judgment. I think you see this numerous times in the Book of Revelation, the people will not repent because their hearts have been so hardened by sin (e.g. Rev 9:20-21; 16:9, 11); but it’s occurring now just as well. Paul says, **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 EACH PERSON ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS.** Two things are said to be **storing up wrath** for themselves. What are they? First, **your stubbornness** and second, your **unrepentant heart**. Let’s look at the first one, **your stubbornness**. The Greek word *σκληροτητα* refers to a hardened condition. They are hardened against God. How did they become hardened? Just look at all the sins they committed in Rom 1:24-2:4. What does sinning like this do to one’s heart? It hardens it until it becomes callous, such that they are now in a state of hardness. Second, an **unrepentant heart**. The Greek word *αμετανοητου* is the negation of repentance. They have not responded to God’s kindness that is designed to lead them to a change of mind. They are **unrepentant** and stubbornly hardened against Him.

Because of these two things these individuals are **storing up wrath for themselves in the day of wrath**. The idea of **storing up** is the same as “treasuring up” as in when Jesus said, “store up for yourself treasure in heaven.” The question is what is the nature of the **wrath** that is being stored up and what is **the day of wrath**? There are four views. First, the BKC (Bible Knowledge Commentary) says that the “focus is...on the fact that God will judge all peoples, not on the details of who will be judged when.”ⁱⁱ Certainly it is true that God will judge and that is the central idea of the passage but it does not seem to take account of all the indicators in the passage that do point to a definite time. Second, Murray says that the wrath refers to “the day of final judgment.”ⁱⁱⁱ Most commentators follow this view.^{iv}

In short, this view says the wrath occurs at the Great White Throne Judgment in Rev 20:11-15 when unbelievers are recompensed for their deeds. This argument may sound convincing but its wrath is not used to describe that judgment in any passage I am aware of. Third, Lopez says that the first use of wrath in v 5 refers to present wrath for sins committed and the second use refers to the future wrath of the seven-year tribulation. He argues that there must be a present wrath in view here because the moralist is in view and if the pagan is presently being judged for his practices then the moralist must also be presently judged for his.^v As convincing as this argument may sound it is not sound to distinguish the two uses of wrath in this verse in terms of present and future. It is better to distinguish them in terms of nature and time. The nature of the wrath here is unique; it is being stored up for a future time. It is therefore not presently being displayed in the world. Fourth, Showers says that the wrath is noticeably unique and refers to the future seven-year tribulation and the great white throne judgment.^{vi} He combines views two and three. Stahlin, another adherent of this view has this interesting quote. "There are two points in the future where eschatological *orge* has a place. First, in the tribulation before the end, then in the final judgment itself."^{vii} This is a fairly sound view. It accounts for the nature of the wrath as one that is being stored up for the future and therefore not presently viewable. It also accounts for the fact that both periods are clear revelations of the justice of God. However, again, wrath is not used of the great white throne judgment in any passage I am aware of. A fifth view seems in order. By wrath Paul is referring to the future judgment phase of the day of the Lord. The period of history known as the day of the LORD is revealed notably over 70 times by the OT prophets and is also used by the NT apostles. When used of the future it refers to a unique period of time when God intervenes in the world's affairs with judgments so catastrophic that almost every inhabitant on earth is destroyed (Zeph 1). Both Jews (Amos 5) and Gentiles (Joel 3) will be caught by this judgment. The judgment phase of the day of the Lord will last more than seven years since it begins prior to the 70th week of Daniel. It is imminent like the rapture and therefore if one misses the rapture he is in the day of the Lord. Several evidences point to "the day of the Lord" as "the day of wrath" referred to here. First, "the day of the Lord" is a future judgment meeting the condition of verse 5 that men are presently storing up this wrath and not presently experiencing it. Second, "the day of the Lord" is commonly characterized as "wrath" by all the OT prophets and NT apostles. Third, other judgment language used throughout

this section is language used elsewhere in conjunction with “the day of the Lord.” For example, verse 8 describes it as “indignation” and verse 9 describes it as “tribulation and distress.” Fourth, “the day of the Lord” concludes with a judgment on the Jew first and also to the Greek as verse 9 attests. This sequence of judgments is also attested in Matt 24-25. Therefore, for these many reasons the wrath that is being stored up is a unique period of wrath that characterizes the judgment phase of the day of the Lord and includes the tribulation and 70th week of Daniel.

When specifically does the day of the Lord begin? Technically 2 Thess 2 teaches that it begins immediately after the rapture of the Church with the revealing of the man of sin, the anti-Christ. His revealing occurs when the Holy Spirit removes the restraint. Thus, when Christians are raptured to heaven they will be rewarded for their deeds at the judgment seat of Christ while unbelievers will remain on earth being recompensed for their deeds by horrific judgments. This passage is like a two-edged sword since it looks at both sides of the judgment. Verse 6 clearly sets this up because it is universal in language. God **“WILL RENDER TO EACH PERSON ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS.”** NO one is excused from judgment. Verse 6 is a quotation from Ps 61:13 and Prov 21:12. It is an old truth that God is just and will therefore judge each person. The basis of all judgment in Scripture is a person’s deeds or works, same Greek word. While all must be judged there are two differences important to highlight. First, the judgment of believers is a judgment that occurs within the family of God for the sake of determining rewards whereas the judgment of unbelievers is a judgment that occurs outside the family of God for the sake of punishing. So the intent of the two judgments is distinct. Second, the judgment of believers occurs in heaven whereas the judgment of unbelievers occurs on earth. So the location of the two judgments is distinct. Some people argue that the church will not be raptured before this terrible time of tribulation because all generations of Christians have faced tribulation. This fails to understand the intent of the tribulation; its purpose is to punish unbelievers. Believers will not avoid their own judgment, but it is one for rewards in heaven.

Having quoted the OT principle that each person will be judged according to his deeds Paul turns us to the believer’s judgment in verse 7. The believer’s judgment is known as the *βημα* or judgment seat of Christ. In eschatology the judgment seat of Christ follows the rapture. The detailed sequence of events

will unfold as follows. At an unannounced time the rapture of all believers on earth will occur. At that moment they will be transformed into resurrection bodies (1 Thess 4:13-18), then taken to the judgment seat of Christ to be rewarded (1 Thess 2:19) and finally presented before the Father (1 Thess 3:13), ever to remain with Christ (John 14:3). Paul speaks of the judgment and reward in verse 7. Verse 7 literally says, **“on the one hand” to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; but** verse 8, **“on the other hand” to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation.** So the two verses are contrasting the two judgments at the end of the present age. Verse 7 is the believers’ judgment following the rapture. Paul says there are rewards for believers who persevere **in doing good**. The reward is stated here to be **eternal life**. Two things need to be noted about **eternal life**. First, eternal life can be a present possession, a present enjoyment or a future reward. The aspect of eternal life that is in view must be determined from the context. John 5:24, for example, refers to eternal life as a present possession; John 10:10 refers to eternal life as a present enjoyment and Gal 6:8 refers to eternal life as a future reward. Eternal life is multi-faceted and should not be reduced to heaven talk. It is what you have now if you are a believer, it is what you enjoy now if you live by faith and it is a future reward if you persevere in doing good. Second, eternal life is more about quality of life than it is about duration of life. Duration is not really the issue. All humans will eternally exist but not all humans have eternal life. Eternal life is therefore really an expression referring to an imperishable quality of life. Again this must be looked at in three aspects. First, all believers possess this imperishable quality of life from the moment of faith alone in Christ alone eternal life; second, believers who abide in Christ enjoy this imperishable quality of life and third, believers who persevere in good works will be rewarded with a heightened imperishable life in the resurrection to come.^{viii} What aspect of **eternal life** is in view here? Clearly it is a future reward because it is given only to those believers who **persevere in doing good**, whereas merely possessing eternal life is a free gift.

So to have this eternal life a believer must **persevere in doing good**. To **persevere** means “to hold out, to endure,” referring to remaining steadfast throughout the Christian life in being the vehicle through which good is produced. So a certain lifestyle is in view that is maintained through the

Christian life all the way to the end. That lifestyle is characterized by **doing good**. **Doing good** is defined in absolute terms as the fruit that issues forth out of our lives as we depend upon the Spirit of God. We are credited with **doing the good** in the sense that when we depend upon Him His good is produced through us. The basis for **doing good** here is that we are **seeking for glory and honor and immortality**. All three words refer to the quality of the resurrection body. The resurrection body is a body of **glory, honor and immortality**. The Christian who is seeking this future body has the right motive for persevering in **doing good**. He wants to be free from his present limited body so that he can live completely for the glory of God, unhindered by his present body. This is the proper focus and when a Christian has it he lives in dependence upon the Spirit and does **good**. When Christ returns for His Church at the rapture then he will be taken to the judgment seat and rewarded with **eternal life**. Again, I want to be clear that **eternal life** is a gift that we receive at the moment of faith alone in Christ alone but it is also something we may or may not enjoy now depending upon whether we are living by faith or not and it is also a future reward that we will receive for persevering in doing good. This passage is clearly referring to **eternal life** as a reward that is above and beyond the present possession of eternal life which all believers possess. This means there are dimensions of eternal life that you have not yet enjoyed but are still to come if you persevere to the end of your life in doing good, keeping the desire for the attaining of the resurrection body at the forefront of your mind which is a proper motive in doing good. In the end we realize that God's salvation is rich and that He has many riches yet to bestow upon us in the resurrection.

So if verse 7 is God's judgment on believers when He returns for them at the rapture then what is God's judgment on unbelievers at that time? Verse 8, wrath and indignation. Like a double-edged sword the destiny of the two groups differ radically. When one is removed from earth and taken to judgment in heaven the other is left behind to receive God's punishment on earth in the day of the Lord and they will not escape.

Verse 8 describes the punishing wrath that they are storing up for in that day. **but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation;** so their just recompense for being **selfishly ambitious** is **wrath and indignation**. The **wrath and indignation** refer to verse 5, **the day of wrath and revelation**

of the righteous judgment of God. They suppose that they are somehow going to escape this wrath. They are not. Paul presented this as if it could have happened in his day. This is because Paul believed both events were imminent. When the rapture occurs those who are left behind can in no way escape, they are in that sense already in the wrath. It is just like Noah's flood in that when the door of the ark closed those who were left off the ark could in no way escape; in that sense they were already in the wrath. Both events are imminent.

Verse 9, ***There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek.*** You will observe that the Church is not present for this time characterized by **tribulation and distress**. 1 Cor 10:32 says that there are three divisions of the human race; Jews, Greeks and the Church of God. Only Jews and Greeks are present for this judgment. That is because the Church has already been removed and taken to its own distinct judgment as verse 7 described. So it is not that we avoid judgment; it is that we are taken to a separate location for judgment that is for believers only. With our absence from the earth the world is set for its judgment which is punishing devastation. It will be a series of judgments described in the Book of Revelation as beginning with seven seals that the Lamb breaks chronologically. When the seventh seal is broken out of it seven trumpets appear, each trumpet is blown chronologically, when the seventh trumpet is blown out of it six bowls appear and each is poured out one upon another in powerful, pummeling destruction. After the twenty-one telescopic judgments Jesus Christ will return to earth with His Church and take the remaining Jews to judgment; following this judgment He will take the remaining Greeks to judgment. This is precisely the order of judgment as described in Matt 24-25. He will judge the whole world for seven years, then take the remaining Jews to judgment and at last the remaining Gentiles to judgment. Then the kingdom will come. This is exactly the order Paul follows here in verse 9, **tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek.** Verse 10 shows that some that enter that period of tribulation and distress will become believers and be rewarded for the good that they do during that time. They are Jews and Greeks distinct from the Church of God but they will be rewarded too. Matt 25 talks about them too so none of this is new, it is already revealed in Matt 24-25 in the exact same order.

The reason of why these judgments is the key to the whole section, verse 11, **for there is no partiality with God.** In short, God is just. This attribute means that God shows no partiality, no matter who might be involved. It doesn't matter whether you are rich or poor, whether you are male or female, whether you are Jew or Greek, if you are a person you have works and these works must be judged. If you are a believer in the Church age then you will be raptured and judged at the judgment seat of Christ and rewarded accordingly. If you are an unbeliever and you are not raptured then you will be judged in the tribulation time and punished severely. If you survive and are a Jew then you will be judged and excluded from the kingdom, if you are an unbelieving Greek then you will be judged after the Jews and excluded from the kingdom. If you survive and are a believing Jew you will be judged and rewarded accordingly and enter the kingdom, if you are a believing Greek then you too will be judged and rewarded accordingly and enter the kingdom. Wherever a person with works exists there must be judgment. God is just.

“Verses 6–11 contain one unit of thought. Note the chiastic structure of this passage. However in this chiasm the emphasis is not on the central element, as is common, but on the beginning and the end, namely that God will judge everyone equitably and impartially.”¹

ⁱ Hindson, E. E., & Kroll, W. M. (Eds.). (1994). *KJV Bible Commentary* (p. 2183). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

ⁱⁱ Bible Knowledge Commentary on Romans 2:5.

ⁱⁱⁱ John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, p 62.

^{iv} See also the Expositors Bible Commentary on Romans 2:5.

^v Rene Lopez, *Romans Unlocked*, p 54-55.

^{vi} Renald Showers, *Maranatha Our Lord, Come!*, p 16.

^{vii} Showers quoting Stahlin, *ibid.*, p 197.

^{viii} Eternal life is also viewed as a reward in John 4:36 and Galatians 6:8-10.

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¹ Constable, T. (2003). *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible*. Galaxie Software.