

Romans 2:8-16

**<sup>8</sup>but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath,**

**Self Seeking-** A man courting distinction, one with a desire to put himself forward. A contender against God.

The root meaning of this word is the word for hireling. A hireling is only concerned about what is in it for him. When the bear attacks the sheep, he just leaves and finds a new job. He doesn't own the sheep's safety as a priority. He only cares for himself and uses the sheep to gain employment.

The King James uses the word contentious. Hodge says that the phrase "of contention" describes a non believer just as "of faith" would define a believer. The man who is contentious has the general current of his life outside of the will of God. This man fights truth within his heart and will eventually fight against those who preach the truth to him.

The word is also used in James 3:14-18 This verse describes the self seeking attitude and its polar opposite proper attitude.

14 But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking (contention) in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. 15 This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. 16 For where envy and self-seeking (contention) exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. 17 But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. 18 Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

We see again that this self seeking isn't so much an incidental attitude but a continual way of life.

In context this contention is being applied to the person in verse 1. It is talking about the man who judges others but won't judge himself.

**and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness-** This judge will not obey the truth. They will not obey God. When you track their behavior to its root, everything is self seeking. Even their benevolence is a service to self. While some people's self seeking leads them to becoming murderers and rapists, others lead them to becoming board members of charity organization. But no matter where it leads them, they are not obeying the truth. They are obeying unrighteousness. While they won't obey God, they will obey something. Their hearts choose a path devoid of God's guidance or God's word. They will "do it their way". If their path conforms to God's word, that is fine. If it disobeys it, that is fine too. The deciding factor is does the path serve self. If it does they will take it. If it doesn't, they won't.

**Indignation-** comes from a root verb- to rush along, to breathe violently. It is used of Pharaoh's desire to kill Moses (Heb 11:27) It is used of the crowd in a rage that wanted to throw Christ over a cliff. (Luke 4:28) This is also a word used in our text to describe God's attitude toward wicked, self serving men.

**Wrath-** Orge This is the word used in verse 18 of chapter 1. It is the word that describes the swelling of fruit until it bursts. It is the gradual building up to a climax of God's wrath.

We see in this passage so far God's attitude toward those who know right from wrong, those who have clearly heard the truth, but show no interest in it for themselves. They won't apply it to themselves and they won't obey it.

**9tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek;**

**Tribulation**- The Greek word means pressure. It would paint a picture for the reader of the imagery of grapes being pressed in a wine press. Scripture speaks of Christ treading the winepress of the wrath of God. The readers would have quickly gotten the point.

**Anguish**- This word means narrowness and is often used for a confinement, a prison. It was used by Plato for calamity and extreme affliction in a narrow place. It is a tight spot.

These two words are added to the verse prior saying that **indignation and wrath** will be upon all those who won't obey truth but obey unrighteousness.

**Tribulation, anguish, indignation and wrath of God.** Who in their right mind would invite all that from the hand of God? What stubborn pride must persist to keep one from repenting.

As I said, the prior verse said this was toward those who won't obey truth but obey unrighteousness. This verse applies the last two attitudes at least, to every man who does evil. God's judgment toward men is always based on their works, but their salvation is never **earned** by works. Their salvation is always a result of grace through faith. This salvation is so powerful that it always leads to obedience. So the works that stem from faith are good works. They are visible and they are evidence of the change that has happened to him. These good works are always evidence that accompanies salvation.

It is important to emphasize here that when Christ says "well done good and faithful servant" it won't be fiction. And it won't be based only on sincerity and good intentions. In a believer's life there must be a BC and AD. There has behavior backed by attitudes that are completely different

than what went before. Christ won't be saying "Well done" to those who have not done well. He is not a liar. He is not saying "I have done well, good and faithful servant." He is saying that the believer has done well. It is important that we get this doctrine straight in our minds. And when we are assailed by those who think that any mention of works is legalism, we can defend our position with what God says about works.

Those who have not been saved by faith are those who do evil. The Greek word for "does" in the phrase "does evil" is in the active tense. It is evil that the person is currently doing. They are currently in the process of doing evil. Anything done outside of faith is sin. Essentially everything that an unbeliever does is in a state of sin and is counted as sin.

#### **of the Jew first and also of the Greek-**

Paul uses this phrase three times in the first two chapters. First he says that the gospel is the power for salvation to the Jew first. Here he says that there will be tribulation and distress to the Jew first. He will go on to say that glory, honor and peace is to the Jew first. Salvation opportunity came to the Jew first. Christ was a Jew. The scripture that prophesied his arrival was given to the Jews. Christ came first to His people, the Jews. So they were the first to have the offer of salvation. Because of that they are also the first to be guilty of rejecting the Messiah and to be judges others but they would not judge themselves. They were guilty of judgment first because they knew the Messiah first.

The Jews in the church may well have thought that God IS partial. They may have thought that salvation is first for the Jews but damnation is first and primarily for the gentiles. Paul is setting the record straight. Jews and Gentiles are together under Christ or under damnation. And it is their actions that show where they stand.

**<sup>10</sup>but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.**

Verse 7 says **<sup>7</sup>eternal life is to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality**

Those who seek glory honor and immortality or incorruption end up getting glory, honor and peace.

Glory and honor we have seen before. Peace is the tranquil state of a soul assured of its salvation through Christ, and so fearing nothing from God and content with its earthly lot, of whatsoever sort that is

While the believer seeks the things of God- the Glory of God, the honor of God and incorruption from things below, what is granted to a believer is glory and honor that Christ shares with his children and the tranquil state of assurance from Christ.

Works what is good- this refers to actions that come from faith in God in the life of a Christian. They are works that are compliant to God's law, whether knowing God's law or not knowing God's law.

Here again we see to the Jew first, and then to the greek.

**<sup>11</sup>For there is no partiality with God.**

The word for partiality literally means to receive a face. It is to give consideration toward a person because of who he is. I don't know if you've ever seen the statue of the lady of justice. She is blindfolded. That is the idea here. This is judging based solely on the facts and not at all based on who it is.

To put it another way, partiality is the fault of one who when called on to give judgment has respect of the outward circumstances of man and not to their intrinsic merits, and so prefers, as the more worthy, one who is rich, high born, or powerful, to another who does not have these qualities. In this case it would be partiality toward one who has the

law over one who does not. Paul will launch right into this issue.

The Hebrews would be having trouble with this idea. Most would feel that God was very partial **toward** the Jews and very **partial** against the gentiles. Remember what trouble Paul got into for just stating that he was sent to the gentiles by God. But Paul is setting the record straight. God is NOT partial. He will treat **all** according to the works that they have performed. This isn't popular teaching because many in our day want to separate out works and salvation by faith, but Paul had no trouble dealing with them in tandem. If God is not partial, impartiality demands works that are done that meet his impartial standards.

**<sup>12</sup>For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law**

As many as have sinned- This sin is not a one time sin. The tense is the aorist tense. The idea is not the committing of a sin but devoting ones self to a life of sin, having sinned and continuing to sin.

The word for perish does not mean annihilation. When something is said to perish, "it is not meant that it ceases to be but that it is so ruined that it no longer subserves the purpose for which it was designed. When new wine is put in old wineskins the wineskins are said to perish." (Barnhouse)

Paul may be building on what he said earlier. If a person does not have the revealed law of God, he still has enough to know that he should and must submit himself to God. Yet he still does not do so for the most part. So they will perish in the state they are in. Or they will be saved in the state they are in. At this point it looks like Paul must clear a misunderstanding.

The passage from 13-16 is difficult. After discussing it with Mike I thought the best approach would be to present

two views of what this passage is saying. There is also a difficulty with the artificial parenthesis before verse 13 and after verse 15. This parenthesis was added by translators. The parenthesis assumes that 13-15 are a diversion from the original conversation and that 16 returns to finish the thought in verse 12. Basically this means that you could read to 12 and skip to verse 16 for the flow of the text. I am going to go ahead with the assumption that the parenthesis is useful in understanding the text. Mike is still considering this and may come with an alternate view. And all of us as Bereans need to determine what we believe.

OK, so Paul starts a conversation in verse 13 that I believe is designed to remove a roadblock, to assail an assumption. The question is, what assumption is he assailing? I think there are at least two options.

- 1- Paul is making it clear that those who have the law and do not obey it are vastly inferior to those who do not have the law and yet **do** obey it.

I will call this the **Gentile Believer** view.

- 2- Or Paul is making it clear that simply because the Gentiles do not have the law doesn't get them off the hook. Just like in Chapter 1, the gentiles show they know enough to do right but still don't do it.

I will call this the **Gentile Unbeliever** view.

Most of the commentaries I read chose option 2.

**<sup>13</sup>(for not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified;**

The word used for hearers here is really more like students. They are not incidental hearers but intentional listeners.

It is clear that many of his hearers must have assumed that those educated in the law gained a positive standing with God by virtue of the fact that they were surrounded with good and accurate teaching about what God had said.

Many Jews, or even possibly Gentile believers probably had cognitive awareness and discipline regarding God's word. They probably heard many sermons, knew right from wrong with great accuracy, had probably memorized much of what God had said. And surely in their minds that counted for something.

Don't we often think the same thing? How much more we know than those around us in the world. How much more rightly we judge right and wrong. How much clearer we see what God likes and what God hates? How proud we can become of our superior position? But what really measures where we stand?? It is that moment when we feel so strongly compelled to do that which our flesh and history tells us we must do. That thing which we know is not by faith, we know that it has not nor will ever honor Christ. But we feel so strongly that we must do it that we do do it. And at that point we show ourselves perilously close to the point of living exactly like the godless, no matter what our knowledge. Assurance comes, not from hearing the law but by doing it. We have little evidence of our salvation when we continually give in to the siren call of our flesh, no matter how well we can spout the rules concerning that behavior. We gain assurance when we do the right thing in the face of that temptation. The doers of the law will be justified.

Now we know that we are not justified **because** we obey the law. But we obey the law because we have **already** been justified. The justified ones live in a way that shows their selves justified. And in this case the justification that is talked about is a future sense. We will be justified. It is possible that this use of the word means we will be proved justified by our works. The state of justification that we have received by Christ's work on the cross will prove itself worthy of a future justification as displayed by the works we do. Every past justified person will prove themselves justified by present and future works.



**<sup>14</sup>for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves,**

Here we have those who have not heard the law pictured in a positive sense or negative sense, depending on our view of this passage. Here are gentiles.

By Nature- Phusis

- 1a) the nature of things, the force, laws, order of nature
- 1a) as opposed to what is monstrous, abnormal, perverse
- 1b) as opposed what has been produced by the art of man: the natural branches, i.e. branches by the operation of nature
- 1b) birth, physical origin
- 1c) a mode of feeling and acting which by long habit has become nature
- 1d) the sum of innate properties and powers by which one person differs from others, distinctive native peculiarities, natural characteristics: the natural strength, ferocity, and intractability of beasts

### **The Gentile Believer view**

This view reads this passage and emphasizes the statement "by nature do the things in the law". If one believes this verse is referring to a person is doing work that is justified, that one is doing the law of God from one's heart, the only person who could do this would be a born again person. And this is true.

The Hebrew cannot normally think of a positive thing about the state of a Gentile. Yet here they are. They don't have the law. But what do they do? They, by the new nature that has been placed in their hearts do the right things, the things that God would want done. They love God and they love their brothers. They live up to the standards of the law, without even knowing what the law says. They are actually doers of the law WITHOUT being hearers of the law. That is amazing. This would be hard on many of the

Jewish listeners. This would break their preconceived notions about the state of Gentiles. The Jews are the ones that can judge most accurately. They are the ones who can most easily say what a sin is and what it isn't. They are the ones to most naturally feel themselves superior. But here is the Gentile in the hands of an impartial judge who is superior to the lion's share of Jews.

**are a law to themselves-** The good behavior of these gentiles who are submitting to Christ and so doing the law, these gentiles become a law to themselves. You can tell if something is right or wrong by watching their lives and seeing what they do. If it is different from how they are living, it is against the law. If it is like how they live, it is submitting to the law.

#### **Now- the Gentile Unbeliever view.**

**<sup>14</sup>for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves**

This view does not assume that the things being done in the law are done from a regenerate heart. The emphasis is not on how good the gentiles are doing, but how much even they reflect a knowledge of God that they are accountable for. This view says that even by the process of nature, no outside forces bringing them the law of God, even left in their current state, look what they do. You can't let a bunch of them out in the woods somewhere without them coming up with some system of law. It won't be exactly like God's law, but it will show similarities at many points. They probably will say that it is wrong to murder. They will probably say that it is wrong to violate another's property in one form or another. They, even by simple growing up as a human will do some form of law that is a reflection of God's law. There is a piece of this that is inborn. There is a piece of conscience that works correctly. And while they do not have the law given to them on stone, they reflect that law

by who they are. They display a law that holds each other accountable for their actions. They are a law to themselves.

**<sup>15</sup>who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves *their* thoughts accusing or else excusing *them*)**

#### **Gentile Believer view-**

In this view, this is a description of how the Christian gentile lives. God has put the law in their hearts.

Hebrews 10: 16 "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them," 17 then He adds, "Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more."

**their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves *their* thoughts accusing or else excusing *them*)**

Here we see a conscience working as it should. It bears witness to right and wrong according to God's law. As these gentiles inter-relate and as they think and speak among themselves, they accurately accuse sinful behavior or excuse behavior as being ok. While they do not know God's law, they walk in the light they have and by nature love God and love His people. They end up with an intuitive judgment that is better than those who have God's law, judge by God's law, but do not live by God's law.

#### **Gentile Unbeliever view**

**<sup>15</sup>who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves *their* thoughts accusing or else excusing *them*)**

Notice that this verse does not say that the law was written in their hearts. It says the work of the law is written in their hearts. This difference leaves room for the idea that

this is not necessarily speaking of believers. This view would say that this is describing that inborn need for law and a natural predisposition toward defining it in some manner like God does. Tribes all over the world, without written documents or outside sources come up with some form of law to guide them. Why is that? Animals don't have that. Yet people do. And they always have a religion of some sort. Animals don't, but people do.

And these people find themselves morally conflicted. Animals don't, but people do. Their consciences get in their way. Sometimes their consciences say they are doing well. Sometimes they say they are doing badly. And sometimes their consciences are right. These people also interact in a way that bears witness of right and wrong. They tell each other what is right and wrong about each others behavior. Sometimes their thoughts say an action is right and incurs no guilt or punishment. Sometimes they say the action is wrong and deserves punishment. This is the nature of humans, no matter where they are, no matter what documents they have or don't have. And by it they all show that those with the law and those without the law are equally damnable.

**<sup>16</sup>in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel.**

Now we jump back to verse 12. The judgment of the wicked referred to there will happen in a future day when all of men's secret thoughts will be laid bare. All of the things they did will be revealed along with the motives that accompanied those actions. They will be shown for what they really are. The actions alone may not seem bad at all but when the secret thoughts are revealed, the treason against heaven will be proven in everything they did.

The judgment will be by Jesus Christ.

John 5:21 For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to them, even so the Son gives life to whom He will. 22 For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment

to the Son, 23 that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.

The Father has given the job of judging to His Son. We started this text talking about men who judge others but refuse to judge themselves. Here we see the Son who will judge all according to the secrets of their hearts. We see the perfect Son who has always judged himself perfectly. Now He will judge all. Who has more right to judge than He who has given his life for His sheep. He who has called all to repentance.

According to my gospel- this is what Paul has always said in his gospels. He has always included the judgment of the wicked in his gospel.

In conclusion I think we would do well this week to think about the importance of our deeds. How have they changed to conform to Christ's rule? How have they not changed to obey Christ? We do well to rid ourselves of the thought that deeds don't matter. Any branch on Christ's tree bears fruit. What is holding our lives back? How are we self seeking and contentious? Let's make every effort to patiently persevere and bring honor & glory to Christ this week.