

Sermons through

Romans

According to His Deeds?

Part One

Romans 2:6-11

With Study Questions

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Part One

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...who “will render to each one according to his deeds”:⁷ eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality;⁸ but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness – indignation and wrath,⁹ tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek;¹⁰ but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.¹¹ For there is no partiality with God. (Romans 2:6-11).

Introduction

As a young Christian I asked many questions about what constitutes appropriate Christian behavior. I also recall, as a youth pastor, hearing these types of questions with great regularity. The question would often be couched in the terms unveiling certain temptations or desires in the person’s life. They were “What can I get away with” questions; “How far can you go?” questions; “How close to the cliff can I play before God flicks me over?” kind of questions.

Being human, these types of questions are understandable, but they are not the kind of questions a parent or a pastor really wants to hear. As a coach I didn’t hear these types of questions. Players wouldn’t ask me how poorly they would be allowed to play before I kick them off the team or how many wrong things or fundamentals flaws I would allow as a coach. They, for the most part, wanted to know the correct way to do things. They didn’t ask how many wrong things they could do but rather, what is the right way to do it? This was, perhaps, because they were motivated. They wanted to be on the team or they wanted to start or they wanted to win.

This issue of what constitutes and should motivate appropriate human behavior has been a source of controversy and turmoil in the church from the very beginning – and not merely in the church. Motivation for appropriate behavior is controversial in many of life’s

arenas. An armed and highly visible militia certainly would affect behavior of the citizenry; a hot tempered, volatile father would affect the behavior of a household; chair-throwing coaches affect the behavior of their athletic teams. And though there might be a place for it, there is a general feeling that the fire-breathing autocrat is not the preferable method to ensure motivation for good behavior – at least not good behavior that comes from the heart.

Of course the message formed by the church in its understanding of the Scriptures has much more at stake than winning games, ensuring peaceful households or societies – heaven and hell hang in the balance. What constitutes appropriate behavior, but more on point with the context of this passage, what motivates people to engage in appropriate behavior becomes the hot topic and there are few passages in the Bible more at the center of the storm than the one presently before us.

Paul will write of two types of people who engage in two types of behavior leading to two opposite destinations. This morning we will discuss the behavior and the consequences of that behavior. Then next week we will discuss how appropriate it is to utilize these two examples as a motivational force in our lives. In other words, it's one thing to say "here is the standard," it's quite another thing to say "here are the rewards or consequences of meeting or not meeting the standard."

Paul writes of "**day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God...**"

...who "will render to each one according to his deeds" (Romans 2:6).

A Day of Judgment

The word "**render**" *apodosei* means "To give or to do something necessary in fulfillment of an obligation or expectation."¹ In other words, God has an obligation to render judgment. The obvious question then is, to whom could God possibly have an obligation? The answer is to Himself – His own nature. When God says that He will in no way acquit the guilty (Exodus 34:7; Numbers 14:18), He must not acquit the guilty in order to stay true to who He is.

¹ Zodhiates, S. (2000). *The complete word study dictionary: New Testament* (electronic ed.). Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers.

To enter into eternity with a God who ignores sin would make heaven more akin to hell and God more akin to the devil – like living in a household with a father who takes no interest in the behavior of his children as they torment one another for all eternity. Evil will not go unchecked. There will be a day of reckoning.

And according to this verse, the reckoning (judgment) will be according to man's "**deeds**" or "**works**" *erga*. In other words, human performance will be judged. This concept would not have been new to Paul's readers.

If you say, "Behold, we did not know this," does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who keeps watch over your soul know it, and will he not repay man according to his work (Proverbs 24:12)?

and that to you, O Lord, belongs steadfast love. For you will render to a man according to his work (Psalm 62:12).

So it is works that regulate the judgment of God – not your profession of faith; not your ethnicity; not your church membership – but works.² Paul then summarizes what these works look like by discussing two groups of people in a literary form called a chiasm – an *a b b a* structure.

In verse 7 he writes of the works of those who gain eternal life; in verse 8 he will write of the works of those who will receive God's indignation and wrath; in verse 9 he writes of the wrath itself then in verse 10 he goes back to describe of the glory, honor and peace of those referenced in verse 7.

eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality;⁸ but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness – indignation and wrath,⁹ tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek;¹⁰ but glory, honor, and peace to everyone

² Profession of faith and church membership, since they are themselves works, would be included in the judgment but would themselves be insufficient to pass muster in the bar of God's judgment.

who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek ¹¹ For there is no partiality with God (Romans 2:7-11).

Patient Continuance

The deeds or works of which Paul writes to obtain eternal life include **“patient continuance in doing good...seek(ing) glory, honor and immortality.”**

This is the person who has signed up for the long haul. It is **“patient continuance.”** Regardless of what misery and apparent misfortune befalls them, they never say their faith is not working for them. Along with Job they proclaim, **“Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him” (Job 13:15).** This man knows the refining work of God: **“But He knows the way that I take; When He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold” (Job 23:10).**

Glory, Honor, Immortality

Over and above the comforts of this world, this person seeks heavenly **“glory.”** The word *doxan* primarily refers to an opinion or estimation. They are seeking the splendor of heaven and high esteem in the eyes of God. Nothing is of greater value to this person than to hear **“Well done, good and faithful servant” (Matthew 25:21)** from the lips of God.

It is heavenly **“honor”** *timen* – a celestial rank dignity – that overrules and overcomes all worldly pleasures and desires. They know this life is so very brief so that they their heart and hopes on **“immortality”** *aphtharsian* – the eternal state which is not subject to decay or corruption.

For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. ⁵⁴ So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.” ⁵⁵ “O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?” (1 Corinthians 15:53-55).

Along with Paul, this person says **“For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21).**

Self-Seeking

He then describes the other person; the person who is not seeking the glory, honor and immortality of heaven, but the **“self-seeking”** *eritheia* person. Interestingly enough, this term was used in a way many of us would understand “before NT times...where it denoted a self-seeking pursuit of political office by unfair means.”³ This person has their own agenda and it takes precedent over all things.

Obedient to Unrighteousness

For this reason Paul writes that they do not **“obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness”** *adikia* – a synonym for injustice. They would use their own heart as the supreme measure of what is good, right and honorable. Not entertaining for a second that the human heart is **“deceitful above all things and desperately sick”** (Jeremiah 17:9).

Indignation and Wrath – Tribulation and Anguish

These people find themselves on the receiving end of God’s **“indignation and wrath.”** These are actually very emotional terms: **“Indignation”** *thymos* meaning an intense expression of the inner self, frequently expressed as *passion*.⁴ **“Wrath”** *orge* is the state of relatively strong displeasure, with a focus on the emotional aspect, *anger*.⁵

Paul finishes his thought in verse nine with by continuing to express what the self-seeking man will be called to endure for all eternity – **“tribulation and anguish.”**

³ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000). *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature* (3rd ed.) (392). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

⁴ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000). *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature* (3rd ed.) (461). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

⁵ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000). *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature* (3rd ed.) (720). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Tribulation” *thlipsis* means to afflict, crush, press and break.⁶
“**Anguish**” *stenochoria* has in view the distress which arises from the tribulation.⁷ In other words, no one will be brave under this tribulation.

Of these very strong and emotionally charged words, Calvin writes:

for we never fear God’s judgment as we ought, except it be set as it were by a lively description before our eyes; nor do we really burn with desire for future life, except when roused by strong incentives, (*multis flabellis incitati* – incited by many fans.)⁸

Peace

Paul completes his chiasm with a reference back to the one seeking eternal life. They will obtain the heavenly glory and honor they desire and they will have “**peace**” in every way imaginable – with God, with others and in their own hearts. It doesn’t matter if you’re a Jew or a gentile – “**There is no partiality with God.**” This is the promise “**to everyone who works (present tense – working) what is good.**”

Going back to the introduction, we might ask ourselves if we are now sufficiently motivated to do good works. And just how high has God, speaking here through Paul, placed the bar? In other words, how patient in my continuance of doing good must I be? With how much vigor must I seek glory, honor and immortality? If heaven comes to all who “**work(s) what is good**” how good must I be and how much work does it take? Or is this even the correct way to approach the issue?

People have come up with a wide variety of answers to these questions – especially as it relates to this passage. We will discuss them next time.

⁶ Zodhiates, S. (2000). *The complete word study dictionary: New Testament* (electronic ed.). Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers.

⁷ Zodhiates, S. (2000). *The complete word study dictionary: New Testament* (electronic ed.). Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers.

⁸ Calvin, J. (1998). *Romans* (electronic ed.). Calvin’s Commentaries (Ro 2:8). Albany, OR: Ages Software.

Questions for Study

1. What is a common question Christians ask about appropriate conduct? What should they ask (page 2)?
2. What are the different ways people come up with what constitutes appropriate behavior? What different types of motivation to ensure that behavior (pages 2, 3)?
3. Why must God judge sin? What regulates God's judgment (pages 3, 4)?
4. What is a chiasm and how does Paul use it in this passage (page 4)?
5. Describe the person who exercises patient continuance in doing good. What is important to that person? What do they seek (page 5)?
6. Contrast the person above with the "self-seeking" person. What are the most notable distinctions (pages 6, 7)?
7. What does it mean to have "peace" (page 7)?