

Romans
Message 27
The Morality Cults 05, Is God Fair and Just 01?
Rom 2:1-11

- 1 Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou
judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things.
- 2 But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against them which
commit such things.
- 3 And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the
same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God?
- 4 Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not
knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?
- 5 But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the
day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God;
- 6 Who will render to every man according to his deeds:
- 7 To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and
immortality, eternal life:
- 8 But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness,
indignation and wrath,
- 9 Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also
of the Gentile;
- 10 But glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also
to the Gentile:
- 11 For there is no respect of persons with God. KJV

Introduction:

We observed how that Paul addressed the openly immoral and wicked pagans in the first chapter of this book of Romans. We have been looking for the past several Sundays at how he has turned his attention to a different group of sinners who are moralists and religionists who have two lists of sins. One list they avoid, at least in their public life and technically, but the other list they keep contains sins they allow but which are condemned by God. We have termed these groups as the Morality Cults.

Imbedded in Paul's argument is an issue over which men have never become quite sure even though it is clearly taught and outlined in scripture. In God's dealings with man (we talked about Judgment in the last message) He always affirms His Absolute Righteousness and Justice. Paul made the comment here in our text, "there is no respect of persons with God."

But when dealing with the issues of God and His Justice men have always struggled and we want to open the topic today to see if we can shed some light on the subject for you that may be of some help.

One of the issues that is making the rounds in our culture right now is one called Social Justice and it debates and wrangles with the topic of fairness as it applies to many issues. In my opinion what is going on for the most part is the dishonest attempt to get people to agree to give up their liberties and be hammered into submission by the charge that some people have an advantage over other people in life and this is wrong. Someone, these debaters think (government), should alter the laws to make things more 'fair' and 'just.'

But humanity has been struggling with this issue for a long time. God added to humanity's problem of fairness by giving us His Laws and insisting that they be kept or else grave penalties would fall on us.

In that whole dynamic, then, there comes to be a division within humanity which Paul mentioned here.

- 6 Who will render to every man according to his deeds:
- 7 To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life:
- 8 But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath,
- 9 Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile;
- 10 But glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile:
- 11 For there is no respect of persons with God.

And, so, the questions come. Is it fair to deal with people this way, to take no notice of a person either to credit him more generously or less so because of his status in life?

Paul lived in a day, much like all other times in human history, when the law of man very much took notice of one's status and weighted that into any judgment that might be rendered.

It noticed when a person was powerful or wealthy or well thought of by the culture and often made many allowances for his wrongdoings. It also noticed when one had no status and no one to defend him, when there was no price to pay for depriving him of justice. Upon such people the law often fell hard even beyond what would be normal justice. Consider how Paul was treated at Philippi. Without having done wrong and without a trial he and Silas were beaten and thrown into prison. The authorities became quite concerned the next morning when they discovered that he did have status and they were subject to the law themselves for having deprived him of his rights.

Men notice when one does and does not have status and render different judgments accordingly. Obviously this is neither fair nor just.

Then, in our time, there are those who believe that Justice should be overbalanced the other way. The one with no status should be given, they say, preferential treatment before the law and the one with status should be treated badly because he or his family has a history of status and,

supposedly, better treatment than they deserve before the law.

God's Plan, however, is to render to every person exactly what he/she deserves regardless of their status or lack thereof.

The King and the pauper
The businessman and the street thug
the preacher and the infidel

all receive exactly what they deserve with no notice made of their status. Their actions and their intentions are judged as a package.

This is because some people do good things, seemingly, but for a corrupt reason.

Mark 12:38-40

38 And he said unto them in his doctrine, Beware of the scribes, which love to go in long clothing, and love salutations in the marketplaces,
39 And the chief seats in the synagogues, and the uppermost rooms at feasts:
40 Which devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayers: these shall receive greater damnation. KJV

These were people of status, with two lists of sin, and who did seemingly good things for wrong reasons.

Isaiah took notice of some in his time. These dared to complain against God because He did not take note of their deeds even though their motives were corrupt.

Isa 58:3-4

3 Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou seest not? wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge? Behold, in the day of your fast ye find pleasure, and exact all your labours.
4 Behold, ye fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness: ye shall not fast as ye do this day, to make your voice to be heard on high. KJV

Mankind, even that part of it that on some level receives the gospel of God, is forever degenerating into that state of mind that considers deeds to be appropriate regardless of the motivations behind them. One phrase we often hear is, "well, at least he is in church." And often we do not notice that we are doing the same thing, sanctioning an action without considering motives.

The Jews had come to actively and consciously believe that motives weighed little in the value of actions. At least this is what they practiced.

In the history of the church even Great Visits of God have been followed by spiritual 'cooling off' periods that then descended into mere mechanical performances of religion in which the heart was not at all engaged.

How engaged is your heart this morning? What is the angel writing in your book concerning

your actions of coming to church today?

It is obvious, then, that deeds which gain the notice of God are a special kind of behavior and the result of a unique form of decision-making.

Look again at v.7 of our text, “patient continuance in well doing” but closely defined as to their nature by flowing out of the intentions and motivations, “who seek for glory and honor and immortality.” The well doing is not well doing unless the motives are proper.

Admittedly, these words are somewhat strange to us and their meaning not altogether obvious.

It sounds, on the one hand, like Paul is laying out a doctrine of salvation by works.

If one were to ‘cherry pick’ this verse out of its setting and its relationship to the whole of the passage it would sound very convincing as a quote to support the point.

But from 1:18 through 3:20 Paul was building the case that renders all men sinners and under the condemnation of God. Then, he proceeded with chapters 4 and 5 to show that Justification by Faith apart from works is the only hope for man. He made a special point of showing that works have no impact on God’s Justifying Process.

So it would be an absurdity to think that Paul has turned aside here in the middle of making that case to teach Justification by Works.

We know from Paul’s great body of work that he neither taught nor believed that salvation is by works so we know that we must seek another understanding of these words.

Rom 3:9-10, 20

9 What then? are we better than they? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin;

10 As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one:

20 Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. KJV

What Paul intends here is an idea that has confused and continues to confuse many.

There will be two issues on Judgment Day. One will be whether one is or is not a child of God by Grace through Faith and the other will be the relative reward or punishment based on one’s actions and motives subsequent to that initial division.

Look again at the way Jesus described the Judgment.

Matt 25:31-33

31 When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him,

- then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory:
- 32 And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats:
- 33 And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.

Then, He will discuss with them the record of their deeds and motivations.

Matt 25:34-36

- 34 Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:
- 35 For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in:
- 36 Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. KJV

Matt 25:41-43

- 41 Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels:
- 42 For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink:
- 43 I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. KJV

John's record has the same format although described a little differently.

Rev 20:11-15

- 11 And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them.
- 12 And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.
- 13 And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works.
- 14 And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.
- 15 And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire. KJV

There is the Book of Life and then there are the 'books.' They are divided as to their eternal destiny by whether they are recorded in the Book of Life, then they are 'judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.' Same format, different description.

We assume that Paul was talking about the same format. The records in the books will commend those who are recorded in the Book of Life and condemn those who are not.

Now someone will surely ask concerning those whose names are in the Book of Life, “what about their sins? They are not without fault, are they?” And it is a fair question. Certainly all of these people have sinned and their sins and failures are real, some of them quite profound. David and his adultery and murder come to mind as well as Solomon and his great failures. I think of the 11 disciples who forsook Jesus after promising they would not and Peter’s great denial. I think of Paul’s mistreatment of Christians and Peter’s slide into heresy at Antioch. I think of the man at Corinth and his unspeakable behavior. What about what is written in the ‘books’ concerning them?

Their sins are surely recorded for there is nothing that fails the notice of the accounting system of God. But, also recorded..... “Paid in Full by the Death of Jesus Christ on the Cross.” Those sins have already been judged, paid, and adjudicated by the Perfect Justice System of God. They are not a part of the equation at the Judgment except to demonstrate how Merciful God is and how Perfect the Work of Christ was. They will redound to His honor but they will have no condemnation associated with them.

These saints of God, down to the very least of them, will be looked at in this way.

7 To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life:

10 But glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile:

Their descriptions are given to make the obvious distinction between them and those who are condemned but their good works are not the cause of their salvation.

That being said, let us now look closely at how the works of the righteous are described.

“patient continuance in well doing”

“Patient Continuance” which is rendered from one word.

It is variously rendered:

“Perseverance in doing good” NAS

“Persistence in doing good” NIV

There is nothing that says these people are perfect or flawless... but they do persist which is a strong theme of scripture.

It is affirmed in each of the notes to the Seven Pastors of Asia in Rev. 2,3.

Rev 2:7

7 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God. KJV

Rev 2:11

11 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death. KJV

Rev 2:17

17 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it. KJV

Rev 2:26

26 And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: KJV

Rev 3:5

5 He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels. KJV

Rev 3:12

12 Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name. KJV

Rev 3:21

21 To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne. KJV

There will be not one person in that great throng on the Right Hand of Jesus Christ at the Great Judgment who did not fail, some of them badly, many times. But.... and this is key.... there will not be one who did not persevere in doing good.

But what is this 'doing good,' this 'well doing,' that Paul mentioned?

We should reasonably infer that his is obedience to the commands of God with a special emphasis on doing good to the people of God.

Matt 25:35-40

35 For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in:

36 Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.

37 Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink?

38 When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee?

39 Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?

40 And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. KJV

This is important to God beyond our wildest imaginations or expectations. Why else would Jesus Himself make it the centerpiece of His discussion of the Great Judgment?

One more point before we finish, what about this phrase, “seek for glory and honor and immortality?”

On the face of it and to our ears it sounds like Paul was suggesting that these to whom God is going to grant eternal life are seeking glory and honor for themselves in this life.

But that would be in opposition to everything that is taught about the character of the believer, would it not?

Without doubt, then, Paul is talking about the glory and honor of heaven, the recognition at the Great Judgment of a life lived faithfully and to the honor and glory of God.

We do seek for immortality. We believe on the Lord Jesus so that we will not perish. We do live with the hope that we will be counted as faithful in His Eyes on that Last Day.

We also know that those who seek honor and glory for themselves in this life have all the reward they will ever get.

Matt 6:2

2 Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. KJV

Our takeaway is this. Motives matter. Persistence matters. Faithfulness matters. Keep pressing on. When you fail, confess it to God, learn from it, do better, and put yourself back on the path. Satan will always be trying to convince you to give up. That is the one thing you must not do.

7 *To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life:*