

# Romans (2:6-16)

## *The Final Exam*

PART 6 - JULY 25, 2004

### WRATH OR REWARD?

In our last lesson, Paul told us not to condemn others; mainly because of two big reasons:

1. Our condemnation is hypocritical and inaccurate

Q: Remember the startled cab driver; turns out he'd driven a hearse for 40 years?

We don't have God's perspective; which is why God alone has the right to "pour out wrath." In contrast to ours ...

2. His judgment is truthful, impartial, and loving

And if you've been keeping track, Paul has given us two insights into God's wrath. Three weeks ago we saw that it's current.

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men ... - Romans 1:18 NIV

Q: Remember the ten mug shots (over 5 years) of the same girl?

- We will exhibit the destructive force of sin, because sin's revealing consequences are the earthly penalty we bear.

And then Paul warned that not only is God's wrath current, there is also a coming "Day of Wrath" as well.

... you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath ... - Romans 2:5 NIV

Q: Remember we have a choice to store up either wrath or reward?

- This is where we left off - and where we'll pick it up.

Have you ever had a nightmare that you're back in school, and you can't find your classroom ... or your locker ... or your pants?! Or, there's a test, and you're NOT prepared? In my nightmares it's Sunday morning and I haven't prepared for the sermon. I try to adlib, and I keep getting interrupted, and people are leaving.

## BE PREPARED

- Paul wants to be properly prepared for this “final exam”.

So today, he’s going to tell us the three subjects that’ll be included in this wrath-or-reward examination.

God will give to each person according to what he has done. To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For God does not show favoritism. – Romans 2:6-11 NIV

Remember, when Paul keeps repeating the line “First for the Jew,” he is speaking chronologically and reminding the mostly Gentile Roman church to respect God’s chosen people.

1. So, the first subject of judgment will be: Conduct

“God will give to each person according to what he has done.”

This is pretty straight-forward. Conduct is the way we act, the way we live, and the things we do. Don’t you wish God judged you for what you *intended* to do?!

Wow, would He be bragging about me! “You can’t believe the way this guy meant to pray! And the way he was always gonna treat his family! He was so unselfish in all of his empty promises! He could’a gone far ... it’s a shame he died at 92.”

Now when Paul says, “To those who by persistence in doing good ... he will give eternal life” it kind of sounds like he’s saying that we can earn our salvation. But that would contradict his earlier claim (1:17) that salvation comes through faith.

There’re two theories on this. A simple theory that Paul is reminding the believers that although salvation is by faith:

- Our conduct conveys our convictions

And, a walk of faith (like any relationship) requires persistence.

The second theory says we must appreciate that true “persistence in doing good” is impossible under the law of Moses; because (as James said):

... whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. – James 2:10 NIV

Paul is driving his (often legalistic) Jewish listeners to his “salvation by faith” declaration (1:17) with a clear-cut choice:

- Receive salvation by faith, or receive judgment by works

This theory seems to go hand-in-hand with Paul’s next passage.

All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law. For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God’s sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous. (Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.) – Romans 2:12-15 NIV

## 2. The 1<sup>st</sup> subject of judgment was conduct, the 2<sup>nd</sup>: Conscience

The ultimate issue in our Christian faith is not how much we’ve figured out about the Bible – but what we did with what we knew. “God, I went to church and I listened ... and I even took notes!”

Paul says it’s not the fact that you heard the word, or knew the rules, but that you didn’t violate that small voice inside.

Q: Ever wonder what happens to the deep-jungle native or the ignorant Aborigine who dies without hearing about Jesus?

Q: Did you know that archaeologists, anthropologists, and missionaries have never discovered a civilization of atheists?

There is a universal desire in mankind to worship. Every tribe (however small) throughout history has had some type of system of worship.

Know what else is universal? The violation of the conscience. Everyone fails to live up to their *own* standard of right and wrong.

- There is a universal moral compass and a universal nature to deviate from it.

This is why missionaries have been so often welcomed into un-Christian communities to bring freedom from guilt and shame.

Q: So, how does God judge ‘em, if they haven’t seen the light?

- First off, light is light regardless of how dim or how bright.

If you were lost in the jungle at night, the least glimmer would attract you ... *if* you desired deliverance from your darkness. But if you wanted to hide something you knew was wrong, you'd flee from the light, regardless of its dimness or brilliance.

My gut tells me that they're judged through Christ according to:

- A. The amount of His light that has penetrated an individual (evidenced by what is written on their heart).
- B. And then, that individual's response to the light (as witnessed by their conscience).

But, the more I know, the more I'm accountable for. We'd have a hard time pleading ignorance. The bottom line is application. What you do with what you know.

- If you've read the Bible ... you're liable.

So, the 1<sup>st</sup> two subjects of judgment were: conduct & conscience.

3. The 3<sup>rd</sup> (and final) subject is: Character

This will take place on the day when God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares. – Romans 2:16 NIV

- Our secrets reveal the real reasons we do what we do.

Reputation comes from what people can see on the surface; but your character comes from what only God can see: your motives.

Everyone has their guilty secrets. Things we shouldn't have done, but did. Things we should have done, but didn't. Paul is relentless in his pursuit to convince his crowd that there isn't one of them who doesn't need what Jesus offers.

On judgment day, nobody will be able to claim that:

- My conduct was blameless.
- My conscience is guiltless.
- My character is spotless.

It could be downright depressing to know that the exam is coming, to know the three subjects that'll be tested, and to know that there's no way you're going to pass.

But, the good news of Paul's gospel is this: If you trust in Christ, you get to skip the exam! Jesus wants to be your savior, not your judge.