

The Impartial Judge Part 1

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Date: 10 August 2014

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[0 : 00] Let's go. When you guys open your Bibles to Romans chapter 2, we're going to focus on verses 6 through 11 this morning, but we're going to read verses 1 through 11 so that you can remember the context and remember the passage that we covered last week.

Now, as you find Romans 2 in your Bibles, I want you guys to stand up in honor of God's Word so that we can read this together. The Apostle Paul writes in Romans 2 verse 1, Therefore, you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges.

For in passing judgment on another, you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things. We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things. Do you suppose, O man, you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you presume on the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? But because of your hard and impenitent heart, you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. He will render to each one according to His works.

[1 : 27] To those who by patience and well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, He will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury.

There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek. But glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek.

For God shows no partiality. Thank You for Your Word, Father. Open it up to us now, we pray in Christ's name. Amen. You guys take a seat.

When you have a house full of kids, like we do, and some of you do still have a house full of kids and some of you have before, some of the complaints that you hear most frequently are things like this.

And these are two that I hear a lot of times. Number one is, it's not fair. It's not fair. Whatever happened, whatever kid got something or whatever kid got punished when the other kid didn't get punished or whatever it is, all the time you hear, it's not fair.

[2 : 32] Or sometimes I hear, a lot of times, and this is probably even more than the other one, a lot of times I hear, I had it first. You know, it's this cry, if something has gone wrong, somebody has taken something that's rightfully mine, I had it first and it doesn't really matter what it is.

It could be a stick laying around in the backyard and literally has been a stick laying around in the backyard a number of times. Because sticks can be swords, sticks can be guns, they can be a bow, it's always a weapon in my house, but they can be all sorts of things, alright?

And I hear those two things all the time. In fact, my kids know what's coming. If they come to me and say, that's not fair, or it's just not fair, they know what's coming. I always tell them, son, because Piper's too little yet to address like this, it's always son.

Son, we don't worry about what's fair. We worry about what's right. And you might think in your head, but aren't those the same thing? And in a sense, they really are the same thing.

But what I mean by that is, fairness, justice in the world is outside of our hands. I want them to understand that very early on. That we can't ensure that justice takes place all the time in the world around us.

[3 : 38] We just can't. Sometimes somebody's going to get a promotion that you deserve.

Sometimes somebody's going to get a raise that you deserve. Or sometimes, you're going to get sick when you didn't do all the things that normally are associated with that particular sickness and

somebody else you know has and they're perfectly healthy and fine.

And you think, well, that's not very fair. But we don't control fair for the most part. We don't control justice as it happens in the world and as it happens to us in all the daily events. But what we do have some influence on is whether or not we do what's right.

Whether or not we make a decision to do what's fair in regard to others as best we can. So they hear it all the time. They can actually usually finish the sentence. Son, we don't concern ourselves with what's fair.

What do we concern ourselves with? What's right. You know, I've heard that before. Over and over we say that. But the reality is it's frustrating. It's frustrating when you're a kid. It's frustrating when you're an adult.

When you look at the world around you and you see that it is just filled with injustice. I mean, what's fair doesn't happen very often. And when it does, it's almost as if we're caught off guard by it.

[4 : 44] Well, I can't believe things worked out like that. I can't believe that happened. Because it's just an unjust, unfair world in which we live. And yet, we have been reading in Romans 2 about a just judge.

About one who will one day set all things right. He will make sure that the fair happens. He will ensure that justice happens. And justice is often not a very pretty picture.

In fact, last week, we saw Paul sort of set his sights on the hypocrites. On those who are religious and who may appear oftentimes externally to be doing all the right things.

But the reality is they're still doing the sinful things that they are condemning in other people.

Romans 1 from verse 18 to the end, verse 32, really nails those who live sinful lives.

But chapter 2 verses 1-5, Paul really deals with those who point to those who live sinful lives and yet harbor sin in their own hearts. And you remember the conclusion to Paul's dealing with the hypocrite?

[5 : 50] Look down in verses 4-5. He says, Do you presume on the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience not knowing that God's kindness, that is, God hasn't stricken you dead even in your hypocrisy yet, not knowing that that very kindness, His kindness is meant to lead you to repentance, but because repentance is not there, because of your hard and impenitent heart, you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.

So there is a day coming in which God's righteous judgment is going to be made known and all of those injustices, all the unfairness in the world around us will be set right.

His righteous judgment will fix all of those things. And now we come in the rest of chapter 2 really to ask the question, how does God go about doing that?

What exactly, what are the criteria by which God judges the world? How does He determine whether or not someone should be punished or rewarded?

How does He meet out justice on that great day of His wrath? Well, take a look at verse 6. Verse 6, He begins to teach us and to show us how this is going to take place, what the criteria are, and it's not complicated.

[7 : 16] He says in verse 6 that God will render to each one according to His works. Very clear, very to the point.

God will render, that is God will give to each person on the face of the earth according to their works, according to what they have actually done in this world.

And that's not a new teaching. That's not something that's found only here in Romans chapter 2. It may sound strange if you're familiar with the book of Romans and you know what's coming in chapters 3 and 4, then to hear the words God is going to render to each one according to their works may sound strange.

You may think that doesn't fit with what I know He's about to say. I think this is why so many people can quote from Romans chapter 1 and then they can quote verses from chapter 3 and maybe even chapter 4, but it's rare to find anybody who can quote a verse that's off the top of their head from chapter 2 because it feels at times as if it doesn't fit and we certainly at times don't like what we hear.

To be judged, everyone, every person according to their works. It's really throughout the Scriptures. Not just here, but throughout.

[8 : 37] I could spend time showing you the Old Testament. We'll consider some of those passages next week when we talk about the role of the law in God's judgment. But I do want to show you just a handful of Scriptures from the New Testament in which Paul and other writers speak of God's judgment being according to what we do, what works happen or are performed in our lives.

So I want you real quickly just to turn over to 2 Corinthians chapter 5. Bill read verses 16 through 21 earlier, but I want you to back up to verse 10 in 2 Corinthians chapter 5.

Just hold your place in Romans. We'll be right back in a minute. But listen to this. Listen to this statement from the Apostle Paul here. 2 Corinthians chapter 5 verse 10. He says, We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

That's pretty clear. A judgment based upon what we have done in the earth, in these bodies, whether it was good or whether it was evil. You can lose that passage and turn all the way over to 1 Peter.

See this? Outside of the Apostle Paul's writings. In 1 Peter chapter 1 verse 17, Peter says, If you call on Him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds.

[10 : 02] Now, pause for a moment there. That word deeds is the same word that we see in Romans chapter 2 translated works. Each one's works. God judges impartially. And what is His judgment based upon?

It is according to each one's deeds or works. Exactly what He says in Romans chapter 2 verse 6. Two more verses and these are from the book of Revelation. So just turn over a few pages in your Bible to the back.

Revelation chapter 20. I'm going to read a few verses here that speak of the judgment. Verse 11.

John in his heavenly vision tells us, I saw a great white throne and Him who was seated on it. From His presence, earth and sky fled away and no place was found for them. He says, I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life.

And the dead were judged by what was written in the books according to what they had done. Judgment according to what they had done.

[11 : 08] One more. Turn one page over if you need to to Revelation chapter 22. And this is Jesus Himself speaking at the end of our Bibles, the end of the book of Revelation. And He says in verse 12, Behold, I am coming soon, bringing My recompense with Me to repay everyone for what He has done.

So God has a standard of judgment by which He will judge every human being who has ever lived on planet earth. And that standard of judgment is clear. It is according to what we have done or according to works, as He says here in chapter 2, verse 6 of Romans.

And that's why He can conclude in verse 11 that God shows no partiality. There is no advantage given to anyone based upon some external characteristic that they might have.

In fact, He's very specific here. He says that judgment will be rendered two times He says it to the Jew first and also to the Greek. In other words, if we could, as people who read the Bible and believe the Bible, if we could think of any sort of external standard by which God might give to someone an advantage, by which God might be partial rather than impartial, it would have to be Jewishness, wouldn't it?

I mean, that's God's chosen people in the Old Testament. Over and over, He does powerful things to rescue them and deliver them throughout the Old Testament. So if anybody's got a leg up on judgment day, if anybody's going to be judged partially, if anybody's going to gain God's favor on that day based upon simply who they are, it's got to be the Jewish people, right?

[12 : 54] No, says Paul. This impartial judgment will be rendered both for Jew and Greek. That is, for Jew and non-Jew. There is nothing in us or about us or in the world around us that would cause God to judge us partially.

That would cause God to show favor to one over another. No, it's a very simple concept. It is judgment according to what we have done in this life. It's not a complicated concept at all. Justice will be rendered and we need justice rendered. But He breaks us down, He breaks humanity down into two categories here in this paragraph. And He speaks of those who do good and then of those who do bad.

And then He talks about those who do bad and He comes back to those who do good. Take a look with me. We're going to look at those who do evil, wickedness, sin first. Okay? So, verse 8, He says, For those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury.

That's the first thing. And then secondly, verse 9, there will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil. And then that added statement, the Jew first and also the Greek.

[14:09] So, wrath and fury, tribulation and distress for all those who do not obey the truth, for those who obey unrighteousness, for those who do evil.

Clear. There will be wrath, fury, tribulation, distress. This is God's just judgment rendered upon those who do wicked and evil in the world.

And we need this. We need to hear this. We need to know this because we are surrounded by such great wickedness. When you do turn on the news and you see those reports coming out of the Middle East and coming out of Iraq in particular, and you see what's being done there to children, it's gut-wrenching.

It turns your stomach. We most of the time try to live oblivious to those sorts of things, but at times they just intrude on our lives. They just, they push themselves into our minds and into our consciences.

And you can't erase them. Some of you may have gone online, I don't necessarily recommend it, but you can see images of awful, terrible things that are happening in that part of the world.

[15:31] Beheadings, people cut in two, people tortured, people starved to death, and much worse. Wickedness, evil, horrible things happening.

And I watch those things on the news and I read about those things and I hear those things and I think, and I pray, God, just do something. Make it right. Do something to those people.

There are times when you see such great wickedness happen and people do such horrible and terrible things that it's just, I think, natural for us. We don't want them to escape the judgment.

We don't want it to happen. And we, all that we are cries out for justice in that moment. And it doesn't matter to us how it comes, whether a bomb is dropped on them or whether a soldier walks into their camp and takes it.

We don't care. We just cry out and we think, will the U.S. do something? Will somebody in Europe do something? Will somebody rise up and fix it and do something? But the truth of the matter is, in this world, for those kinds of things, there can be no justice.

[16:38] It can't be fully meted out. You can't justly punish someone who has done those kinds of things to people by dropping a bomb on them. That's the easy way out.

That's instant death. They didn't give that to anyone around them. And so even when on the surface level it looks as if our desire for justice prevails, the truth is, it doesn't in those circumstances.

But Paul says, the Word of God here says, there will be wrath. There will be fury. There will be tribulation. There will be distress for every person who does evil.

It will happen. You see, one of the most common objections to Christianity from non-believers is, if you say that God is good and He's powerful and He's sovereign and He's able to do what He wants to do, then why is there evil in the world?

Why doesn't He do something about it? And the answer is, He will do something about it. He will absolutely set all of these things right. And He has His purposes. He has His plans for human history.

[17:50] Why He doesn't always intervene in the moment. And we can't understand all of those. But even when we don't see it in the moment, we have absolute certainty that there will be a just judgment rendered for every single human being on the planet.

It's going to happen. And that should be a comfort to us. That should help us on our days when we just feel, we feel the awful weight of the things we hear and see happening around us.

But these, that's not the only category that Paul addresses. And in fact, that's not a difficult category for us to understand. We want that. We cry out for that sort of thing. That's not a tough category for us to understand.

But what we do with the other category is tricky. It's difficult. Take a look at the other group that Paul mentions. Verse 7, To those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, He will give eternal life.

Literally, it says, to those who by endurance in good works seek for glory and honor and immortality, He will give eternal life. And then, He says further down, verse 10, He will give glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good.

[19 : 07] That's a problem because we know that we don't gain eternal life through good works, right? I mean, is that not what the book of Romans is primarily about?

Over and over we're told that we are justified. That is, we are declared righteous by God not on the basis of works, but on the basis of faith alone. And in fact, because we are all sinners, we cannot earn God's approval.

We cannot gain eternal life no matter how much good we try to do. We know that. I mean, just take a look down in Romans chapter 3. He says in verse 26 that God saves the way that He saves in order to show His righteousness at the present time so that He might be just and the justifier not of the one who does good works, but of the one who has faith in Jesus.

Or, verse 27, what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded by what kind of law? By law of works?

No. We don't get to boast in good works because we don't have them by law of works?

No. But by the law of faith for we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law. How do we reconcile that with to everyone who endures in good works and is seeking glory and honor and immortality, He will give eternal life.

[20 : 28] How do we reconcile that with no one gets justified by the works of the law? How do those two things fit together? Well, there are two solutions that have been proposed and I want you to be aware of both of these interpretations for a couple of reasons.

Number one, I am not 100% sure that I've got this little knot untied. Okay? I'm not 100% sure. That happens. No matter how much time sometimes I sit at my desk and plug my ears to drown out the noise in the summer from kids running around, no matter how much time I spend in the books, sometimes at the end of the day I feel pretty certain that I got it right, but there's some ambiguity there.

Alright? So that's one reason why I want you to know both interpretations. But the other reason is because I found myself, as I came to my conclusions and have some level of certainty about it, though not complete certainty, as I come to my conclusions, I find myself at odds with many preachers and Bible commentators that I usually agree with and that I hold in high esteem.

Now, I don't usually, as I prepare sermons, I don't normally consult other preachers. I'll read my commentaries, I spend most of my time looking in Bible dictionaries and things that, you know, you probably don't want to bother with, but that's what I usually, but I will occasionally consult and see, how does so-and-so interpret this passage?

Or how does he apply this to somebody to try to get some ideas and get the brain working correctly? And normally, if I do that, there are two preachers that normally I'll consult because I can look up their full manuscripts of all their sermons online.

[22 : 01] I'll look at what John Piper has to say and then I'll sometimes look at what John MacArthur has to say because they both preach through Romans and many other books of the Bible and I can just look it up and I can read a full manuscript of their sermons and it's easy to see what they've said about it.

So this week, I do that because I find my commentaries disagreeing with one another. I find myself in a bit of a quandary leaning one direction but most of my commentaries go in another direction. I love to see what these other guys have to say.

And both of them point in a different direction from the direction where I headed and where I eventually landed. So for those two reasons, I want you to know what both interpretations are.

So let me give you the interpretation that I did not ultimately feel fit here with the overall context but I want you to understand it because you'll hear it in other places.

This interpretation says that those who do good works here are Christians who are producing what Paul calls the works that proceed from faith.

[23 : 00] So Paul says in Galatians that nothing counts but faith working through love. And so what these interpreters say is that on Judgment Day, God will look at what we have done.

And for those who follow Christ, because faith in Christ, which alone justifies, because that kind of faith automatically produces good works, God can then look at our lives and if he sees good works there, that is evidence that we have fully trusted in Christ and that we are justified in His sight.

So in this view, this is a reality. There are people who, they say, perform these good works and those people are Christians and those good works on Judgment Day are proof or evidence that we have fully trusted in Christ.

Why would they argue something like that? Well, one reason is because at the end of chapter 2, and this is something that we will consider in a few weeks and I'll tell you how I understand this, but at the end of chapter 2, Paul does speak of those who are circumcised in the heart rather than in the flesh.

He speaks of those who are circumcised by the Spirit and they receive their praise from God and not from men. He says that at the end of chapter 2, which seems to be a pretty clear reference here to those who are true followers of Christ, those who have been inwardly changed by the Spirit of God.

[24 : 28] So there is at the end of chapter 2, at the end of this section in which Paul is dealing with Jewishness before God, in which Paul says what really counts is not physical Jewishness, but spiritual Jewishness, that is the circumcision of the heart.

And so there is a reference at the end of chapter 2 to those who trust in Christ and therefore are the spiritual inheritors of the promises.

And so there is that verse there that points a lot of commentators to say perhaps it's those people in verse 29 that he has in mind here in verses 6 and 10.

Perhaps. 7 and 10. Perhaps those people are the ones he has in mind. Because elsewhere in the New Testament we do see frequently that faith in Christ, justifying faith, produces good works. In fact, we see that not in that language, but we see it in Romans chapter 6 if you want to turn there. In Romans chapter 6, Paul is discussing the fruit of justification. The fruit that is present and evident in the life of one who is trusted in Jesus.

[25 : 35] And listen to what he says in verse 17 of Romans 6. He says, Thanks be to God that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed and have been set free from sins and have become slaves of righteousness.

So in Paul's mind, those who trust in Christ are freed from sin and now slaves of righteousness. That is, those who trust in Jesus have a fundamental change happen within them and continue to happen within them through the power of the Spirit such that no longer are their primary desires directed at sin, but now directed towards pleasing God and righteousness.

So that is a natural fruit, Paul says, of justification which happens by faith alone. Or, consider Ephesians chapter 2 verse 10, which most of you are familiar with.

Verses 8 and 9 talk about being saved by grace alone through faith alone. And then verse 10 says, we are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

Good works. The same words used in Romans chapter 2. So, faith which saves or justifies produces good works and many preachers and commentators are saying those are the kinds of good works referenced in Romans 2, 6-11.

[27 : 04] One more passage because I think that it states this even more clearly than Ephesians chapter 2. Titus chapter 3. Alright? If you don't know where Titus is, check the screen out.

I think Kay might have it on there. Alright? Titus chapter 3 verse 1. Paul's giving instructions. He says, remind them, that is, remind believers to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready.

Here it is. For every good work. So, remind them. They need to do good works. Then if you jump down to verse 4, he says, but when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, He saved us not because of works done by us in righteousness.

So here, you can have good works in the life of a person, good works that matter, yet, we are not saved by our good works. That much is clear.

But we are saved according to His own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit whom He poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior. So that, now listen carefully, so that being justified by His grace, that's how justification comes, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

[28 : 13] And the saying is trustworthy. I want you to insist on these things so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works.

So the pattern of the New Testament is, faith in Christ justifies us before God and we are now right in His sight so that ultimately eternal life is gained by us on the basis of faith apart from any kind of works.

And yet, if that faith is real and authentic and genuine, it will also result in the Holy Spirit dwelling within us who will then produce all sorts of good works in our lives.

And many, many interpreters, as I said, some of my favorite preachers and some of my favorite commentators, read Romans 2 and they hear of those who by patience and well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality receiving eternal life and they say that must be, since the end of this chapter mentions those circumcised in heart, that must be Christians whose good works demonstrate their faith and therefore those good works can in a sense as evidence of faith be said to gain them eternal life.

That's one interpretation. Alright? I took most of my sermon now to explain something I disagree with. Alright? Second interpretation. And this is the direction that I lean and that I think we should go.

[29 : 44] Second interpretation says this, it is absolutely true that God will render eternal life to all those who endure in good works. And I think the word endure or patience here is key because this is not an occasional good works.

This is not a general pattern of good works in someone's life with sin sprinkled in. This is a continual endurance in doing what is right and good in God's sight.

This is continuous. Okay? That's how I take this. And so I think what Paul is saying is all those who really do all the time what is good and right who are fully obedient to my word to those I will give eternal life.

I will do it, he says. Except that they don't actually exist. That's the point I think of the broader context. Because if you remember from Romans chapter 1 verse 18 to the middle of chapter 3 Paul's goal overall is to prove and show that we are all sinners both Jew and Gentile both religious and non-religious we are all sinners we all deserve the wrath of God and therefore the only hope that we have is that God might save us some other way that He might make us right with Him through some other means because we cannot do it by our own living.

In fact, look down in chapter 3 in verse 9 He says, what then? Are we Jews any better off? Jews because they have the law? No, not at all. Now this is how he sums up chapter 1 verse 18 through chapter 3 verse 8.

[31 : 26] Listen to his summary of all those verses. We have already charged that all both Jews and Greeks are under sin. You see that? So the main point of 1.18 all of chapter 2 and now the first several verses of chapter 3 the main point is one thing show that everyone is under sin show that every single human being because of their sin deserves judgment and then he goes on as it is written none is righteous no not one no one understands no one seeks for God all have turned aside together they become worthless no one does good not even one so who is the one who by endurance in doing good obtains eternal life he doesn't exist no one is righteous no one is good not one single person and Paul has now at this point in chapter 3 he has proven his case and so I ask the question how does Paul referencing

Christians obtaining or proving that they are saved and obtaining eternal life by that proof how does that go towards proving Paul's main point and I don't think that it does so because of the immediate context and because of Paul's overall thrust in this part of Romans I think that the person who does good works is someone who actually earns merits eternal life because of perfect obedience and there is no such person except for Jesus himself they don't exist it's a hypothetical if they did exist eternal life they don't exist which means if you're thinking this through that it's not terrorists and mass murderers alone who belong in the category of those who do not obey the truth but obey unrighteousness it is not merely the worst among humanity that does evil it is all of us all of us and every and every time we cry out for justice we are crying out for our own condemnation because justice demands it and yet the point of this book and the point of these first four chapters especially of the book of Romans is that there is hope for unrighteous sinful people and that hope is the blood of Christ shed on the cross for our sins as Bill read earlier

God made him who knew no sin to become sin so that in him in Christ by faith in him we might become the righteousness of God is there a judgment according to works yes how do you as a sinner survive judgment according to works you have the perfect obedience of Christ plastered all over you and covering you because you trusted in him alone for your salvation and this is good

news this is the best news of all this means that even the worst of us could be saved even the worst of us could be redeemed from our sins it is astounding for me to think that those perpetrating the brutality on the other side of the world if they would but repent of their sin and trust in Christ they would survive the judgment but that's good news to hear because it means no matter what I have done no matter what sins I have committed or no matter what those that I love have done and let's be honest all of us have family members and friends from our past and maybe even the present we all have people that we love and care about and yet they have done some terrible things and there's no hope for them if there's only a judgment according to their works but if there's one whose perfection might be counted as theirs there's hope for them and our task is not complicated our task is to show them that hope but they cannot see that hope and we cannot see and understand that hope unless we first understand that there is a just judge in the universe and he will judge everyone according to what they have done and the only thing that can rescue you is faith in Jesus we must not shrink back from declaring to them that there is a just God full of wrath and fury toward them you cannot preach the gospel you can't witness to someone if you're too afraid or unwilling to say to them wrath and fury awaits you now let me tell you good news we must be bold we need to celebrate that there is a just judge who will set all things right one day and we need to have our hearts and our fears calmed when we are upset by the things we see and hear in the world we need to be calmed by knowing that he's a just judge we need to be afraid by knowing that we're a sinner and he's a just judge and then we need to rejoice by knowing that Christ has received the judgment that we deserve if we will but trust in him let's pray