

**ROMANS: PART 5****YOU CAN'T EARN YOUR WAY INTO HEAVEN**

Our study today begins where we left off last time at Romans 2:4, 5. If you recall, Paul is writing to the Jews in Rome who consider themselves to be in good standing with God, whereas they consider the non-Jews, whom they criticize, not to have such standing. Let's begin with verse one to give those who might not have been here last week a little background, Romans 2:1-5:

*You may be saying, "What terrible people you have been talking about!" But you are just as bad, and you have no excuse! When you say they are wicked and should be punished, you are condemning yourself, for you do these very same things.*

*2 And we know that God, in his justice, will punish anyone who does such things.*

*3 Do you think that God will judge and condemn others for doing them and not judge you when you do them, too?*

*Don't you realize how kind, **tolerant**, and patient God is with you? Or don't you care? Can't you see how kind he has been in giving you time to turn from your sin?*

*5 But no, you won't listen. So you are storing up terrible punishment for yourself because of your **stubbornness** in refusing to turn from your sin. For there is going to come a day of judgment when God, the just judge of all the world,*

We'll stop there, even though I know you want to hear the rest of that verse, and if you have been reading along with me, you certainly can complete it now.

People are guilty of rejecting God's goodness, mercy and grace, and they even go on to mock His kindness. *Stubbornness* in verse 5 means an "unreasonable persistence, a hardness, a mind that will not be changed in spite of overwhelming evidence." They refused to accept the goodness of God. They refused to accept how valuable this goodness was. People today don't recognize how valuable His goodness is either.

The word, *tolerant*, in verse 4 means "truce." It is a cessation of hostility. It means that God is withholding judgment for the time being. So in these two verses we see that **God is good** and that **He's withholding His judgment**. God says that for the time being there's going to be a truce and no hostility between Himself and humankind. God will be patient because He doesn't want anyone to perish as Peter writes in 2 Peter 3:9:

*The Lord isn't really being slow about his promise to return, as some people think. No, he is being patient for your sake. **He does not want anyone to perish**, so he is giving more time for everyone to repent.*

Isn't it interesting that the psalmist said something very similar way back in Old

Testament times when he wrote in Psalm 103:6:

*The Lord is merciful and gracious; he is slow to get angry and full of unfailing love.*

God is just plain good! Many people would question that today because they think it inexcusable that God would allow tragedies to befall decent people. In the first place many of those tragedies occur because of the sin of people themselves. A murderer takes a gun and uses it to shoot innocent people. Or someone on drugs or alcohol gets behind the wheel of a car and crashes head on into another car. However, the truth is that God has a purpose for everything, including suffering. When a tragedy occurs in a person's life or to groups of people in various parts of the world, God has a purpose in allowing that to happen. When we look back on events that have occurred in our lives ten years later, we may actually see more clearly the good that may have resulted from what once seemed to be such a time of suffering. You may accept this explanation or you may not, that is between you and God. But one thing we can point out to you for certain is what the Bible says, and in Romans 8:28, it says this:

*And we know that in ALL THINGS God works FOR THE GOOD of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*

We'll study this verse in much greater detail when we get to chapter 8 of Romans, but for now let it simply be understood that no matter what happens to a person who has accepted Jesus as their personal Savior, **God will bring good out of it.** No matter how bad things may seem when they happen, God will turn those things into benefits if you love Him and seek with all your heart to follow His commands. God is good if you're His child, and if you're not, He's patiently waiting, without judging you, for you to ask to become His child. He'll give you a lot of time. In fact you have right up until the day you die to ask for that status. But the moment you die, your time has run out, it's too late, and there's no process for appeal. Your eternity is cast in stone.

Many people say, "*Well then, I can go on having a good time until I get older and then I'll think about this religion stuff.*" Big mistake! What if you get hit by a truck tomorrow? It's too late. What if you're involved in a plane crash or any of hundreds of other things that can happen that could take your life in the blink of an eye? It's too late then. "*Don't put off until tomorrow what you can do today.*" It could very well determine where you spend forever.

Many people also think that God will be merciful to them no matter what they do because mercy is His job. They don't believe for a minute that God would judge them. They have the feeling that everything is going to be okay. Well, God's patience with you will last until the moment you die, but after that if your sin hasn't been covered by the atoning death of Jesus, there will be judgment, and yes there is a Hell, and you definitely don't want to go there. This church will take whatever time necessary to attempt to answer any and all questions you have about the Bible, and if there's a question we can't answer, we

won't mislead you, we'll seek the answer from reputable sources and then let you and God work out what you are willing to accept or reject. There is nothing higher on the priority list of Village Church than to help others establish a true faith based on what Jesus did on the cross. Goodness despised leads to the end of goodness and ultimate judgment as we read in verse 5:

*But no, you won't listen. So you are storing up terrible punishment for yourself because of your **stubbornness** in refusing to turn from your sin. For there is going to come a day of judgment when God, the just judge of all the world,*

Now we'll go on to verse 6:

*will judge all people according to what they have done.*

This is not a new idea in the Bible. In fact it was stated way back in the Old Testament. Let's take a look at just a couple of verses where this is stated. First we'll look at Jeremiah 17:10, then Isaiah 3:10, 11:

*But I know! **I, the Lord, search all hearts and examine secret motives. I give all people their due rewards, according to what their actions deserve.***"

*10 But all will be well for those who are godly. Tell them, "You will receive a wonderful reward!" 11 But say to the wicked, "Your destruction is sure. You, too, **will get what you deserve.** Your well-earned punishment is on the way."*

The Old Testament tells us that God will judge based on the lifestyle of a person. Let's look at some verses in the New Testament that emphasize this truth as well, Matthew 16:27:

*For **I, the Son of Man, will come in the glory of my Father with his angels and will judge all people according to their deeds.***

2 Corinthians 5:10:

*For we must all stand before Christ to be judged. **We will each receive whatever we deserve for the good or evil we have done in our bodies.***

While eternal life is a free gift given on the basis of God's grace (Ephesians 2:8,9), our lives will be judged by Christ. This judgment will determine our rewards and will be based on how we've lived. Faith in Christ does not free us from obedience. Believers will also be judged according to how they've lived. **THEIR FAITH WILL GET THEM INTO HEAVEN, BUT ETERNAL REWARDS WILL BE BASED ON HOW THEY'VE LIVED.** The only issue will be whether or not a person has lived a life in obedience to the will of God.

One's lifestyle is an index to what they believe in.

Don't misunderstand that any of these verses are suggesting that your salvation is based on the good works that you do. It isn't. When you place your faith in Christ, the Holy Spirit becomes a part of you in order to make the power of God available to you so that you are able to do the good things God wants you to do. The deeds you perform, therefore, are a fair indicator of where you stand with God.

Now let's look at the two alternatives people have for eternity. First of all we'll look at those who receive eternal life and then those who don't, Romans 2:7-11

*He will give eternal life to those who persist in **doing what is good, seeking after the glory and honor and immortality** that God offers.*

*8 But he will pour out his anger and wrath on those who live for themselves, who refuse to obey the truth and practice evil deeds.*

*9 There will be trouble and calamity for everyone who keeps on sinning.*

*10 **But there will be glory and honor and peace from God for all who do good.***

*11 For God does not show favoritism.*

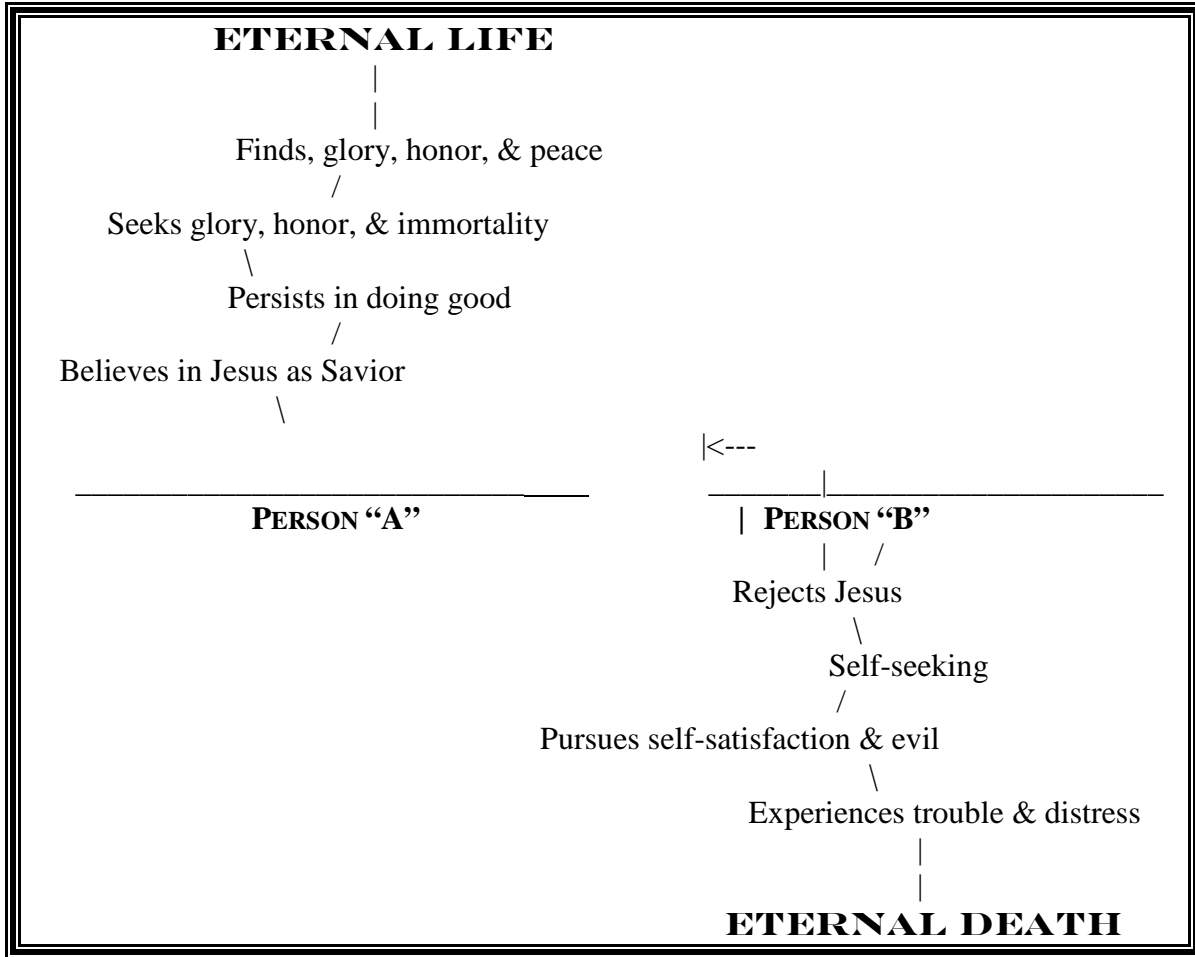
Paul's purpose here is **not to describe a way of salvation**, but the behavior that is produced by salvation, the behavior of a person who has been truly saved. When God judges our works, those who possess eternal life will be those who have persisted in doing good, not to win salvation, but because they care about "**glory, honor, and immortality,**" and not the things of this

world.<sup>1</sup> "*Doing what is good*" in verse 7 means that people do things which seek after glorifying God, and in so doing provide glory for themselves, and they can do this only because of a circumcised (repentant) heart which can only be brought about by the Holy Spirit of God (see Romans 2:29).<sup>2</sup>

God will bestow eternal life on those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor, and immortality. On the other hand wrath and anger will be the portion of the self-seeking . . . who reject the truth and continue to pursue evil. Each one who pursues those things which are evil will receive trouble and distress, whereas each one who pursues the good will have glory, honor, and peace. This just compensation by God is without regard to ethnic background and applies to all people everywhere. But just as there will be varying degrees of compensation or rewards, the same will hold true of punishment. Perhaps this is best illustrated in the following diagram:

<sup>1</sup> Richards, L. 1991. The Bible reader's companion. Includes index. Victor Books: Wheaton, Ill.

<sup>2</sup> Hafemann, Scott, The God of Promise and the Life of faith (Wheaton, Good News Publishers). 2001. P.181.



God is totally fair. He doesn't favor certain people over other people, nor does He hold people responsible when they don't know as much as someone else knew who had more exposure to the Word of God. God deals fairly with everyone according to the availability of knowledge they had. God won't judge every one the same and we see that in Romans 2:12-24:

*God will punish the Gentiles when they sin, even though **they never had God's written law**. And he will punish the Jews when they sin, for **they do have the law**.*

*13 For it is not merely knowing the law that brings God's approval. **Those who obey the law will be declared right in God's sight**.*

*14 Even when Gentiles, who do not have God's written law, instinctively follow what the law says, they show that **in their hearts they know right from wrong**.*

*15 They demonstrate that God's law is written within them, for their own consciences either accuse them or tell them they are doing what is right.*

*16 The day will surely come when God, by Jesus Christ, **will judge everyone's secret life**. This is my message.*

*17 If you are a Jew, you are relying on God's law for your special*

*relationship with him. **You boast that all is well between yourself and God.***

*18 Yes, you know what he wants; you know right from wrong because **you have been taught his law.***

*19 You are convinced that you are a guide for the blind and a beacon light for people who are lost in darkness without God.*

*20 You think you can instruct the ignorant and teach children the ways of God. **For you are certain that in God's law you have complete knowledge and truth.***

*21 Well then, if you teach others, why don't you teach yourself? You tell others not to steal, but do you steal?*

*22 You say it is wrong to commit adultery, but do you do it? You condemn idolatry, but do you steal from pagan temples?*

*23 **You are so proud of knowing the law, but you dishonor God by breaking it.***

*24 No wonder the Scriptures say, **"The world blasphemes the name of God because of you."***

For those of you who are not familiar with God's formation of the nation and people of Israel, we'll just say this to help you relate better to these verses. About 2000 B.C, God appeared to Abraham and made him several promises which included that he, Abraham, would be the father of a nation that **God would form for the purpose of spreading the truth of the Word of God to the rest of the world.** The Jews, without justification, came to believe over the years that this meant they were the special people of God and they received salvation and eternal life automatically. Big mistake! We begin to see why in verses 12-16.

Wherever you go, you find people with an inner sense of right and wrong; and this inner judge, the Bible calls "**conscience.**" You find among all cultures a sense of sin, a fear of judgment, and an attempt to atone for sins and appease whatever gods are feared.

In verses 12 and 13, Paul makes it clear that it is not simply knowing the Law that counts, but **obeying the Law.**

The Jews looked on the Gentiles as blind, in the dark, foolish, immature, and ignorant! But if God would find them guilty of not obeying the Law even though they had not heard or read it, how much more guilty were the "privileged" Jews to whom God gave and instructed in the Law, so that they might teach the rest of the people of the world? God not only judges according to truth (Rom. 2:2), and according to people's deeds (Rom. 2:6); but He also judges "the secrets of people" (Rom. 2:16). He sees what is in the heart!

The Jewish people had a religion of outward action, not inward attitude. They may have been moral on the outside, but what about the heart? Jesus' indictment of the Pharisees in Matthew 23 illustrates the principle perfectly. God would say the same things to the

Church in 2004. God not only sees the deeds but He also sees the “*thoughts and intents of the heart*” (Heb. 4:12). In the Sermon on the Mount we are told that **sins can be committed in the heart.**

Instead of glorifying God among the Gentiles and teaching them about God, the Jews were dishonoring God. The Gentiles had daily contact with the Jews in business and other activities, and they were not fooled by the Jews’ devotion to the Law. The very Law that the Jews claimed to obey only indicted them!<sup>3</sup> And that’s exactly what’s happening in the greatest majority of churches in this country. Church-going people act so self-righteous and they have no reason to. And if their expressed belief in Jesus is not confirmed by behavior that demonstrates the presence of the Holy Spirit within them, the likelihood that they are truly saved is questionable, and it could therefore mean they are going to be judged in the same way as un-churched people because their religion is only external and not from the heart. God made the following **promise** back in the Old Testament to the people of Israel through the prophet Jeremiah around 600 B.C., Jeremiah 31:31-33:

*31 “Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant (promise)<sup>4</sup> with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, 32 not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord. 33 But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and **I will write it on their hearts.** And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.*

When Paul describes how people positively respond to the gospel message when they hear it, he says that it is the power of the Holy Spirit working on them to receive that truth. Now they can reject that influence of the Holy Spirit, but they can accept it as well, and without the power of the Holy Spirit working within them no one would be capable of accepting the message.

Paul preaches **the gospel**, which is the good news about Jesus and why He has come. In and through that message, God works by His Spirit to change their hearts. As a result of this, they come to believe the gospel message. God then declares that the person who believes the Gospel is righteous and a member of the covenant family of God. Justification is not how someone becomes a Christian. It’s the declaration that they have become a Christian. Believing in the Word of God and worshipping the true God results in a transformation whereby one becomes a more complete human being. Paul tells his Jewish readers that the only person deserving the name, **Jew**, is the person who is one in their heart.

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<sup>3</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. 1996, c1989. The Bible exposition commentary. "An exposition of the New Testament comprising the entire 'BE' series"--Jkt. Victor Books: Wheaton, Ill.

<sup>4</sup> Parentheses added.

The Gospel is the announcement that Jesus is Lord of the world. Preaching the Gospel means announcing Jesus as Lord of the world and seeking to bring that lordship to bear over every aspect of the world.

The Church was never meant to be a private, pious religious club. In order to be effective communicators of the Gospel we need to confront the powers of the world and let them know that Jesus is Lord, and because of that there is a different way of being human, a way characterized by love, justice, honesty, and by the breaking down of the barriers that reinforce the divisions which keep human beings separate from and often at odds with one another. There is no sense in saying this, however, if the Church is not saying it by its very life, by the way the members of the Church conduct themselves in the world. If Jesus is truly the Lord of the world, then there is a different sort of power, a power that is made perfect in weakness.

It is through the death and resurrection of Jesus through which God's promise, to deal once and for all with the sin of the world, would finally be accomplished. God has dealt with sin through the cross of Jesus. He has found Jesus to be blameless, to have lived a perfect life without sin, and has declared Him **righteous** by raising Him from the dead. The faithfulness of Jesus, the obedience of Jesus, is the means by which God can reveal His righteousness..

By faith in Jesus Christ and his work of atonement, people are able to **RECEIVE GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS**. They are given a true relationship with God which involves the forgiveness of all sin and a new moral standing with God in which they find themselves in union with Christ, the Righteous One (Romans. 3:21-31; 4:1-25; 10:3; 1 Corinthians. 1:30; 2 Corinthians. 5:21; Phil. 3:9).

Those vindicated on the last day will be those in whose hearts God will have written His law. The process is not done by the Law, but by Christ. What was needed was a faithful messenger, a true Israelite, who would deal with the sin of the world. Jesus accomplished this and through Jesus' act of faithfulness, God then reveals His righteousness. The law is therefore not eliminated, but kept through Jesus who is the only one who was ever capable of keeping it completely. God sees those who are united with Jesus through faith, both Jew and Gentile alike, as keepers of the Law also, which results in their being declared righteous as well. It is not possible to be declared righteous by God without this union with Christ, simply because no human being is capable of keeping the Law perfectly.

Now let's move on to the concluding verses of this chapter by looking at Romans 2:25-29:

*The Jewish ceremony of circumcision is worth something only if you obey God's law. But if you don't obey God's law, you are no better off than an uncircumcised Gentile.*



*26 And if the Gentiles obey God's law, won't God give them all the rights and honors of being his own people?*

*27 In fact, uncircumcised Gentiles who keep God's law will be much better off than you Jews who are circumcised and know so much about God's law but don't obey it.*

*28 For you are not a true Jew just because you were born of Jewish parents or because you have gone through the Jewish ceremony of circumcision.*

*29 No, a true Jew is one whose heart is right with God. And true circumcision is not a cutting of the body but a change of heart produced by God's Spirit. WHOEVER HAS THAT KIND OF CHANGE SEEKS PRAISE FROM GOD, NOT FROM PEOPLE.*

Circumcision for the Jew was like baptism for the Christian. It didn't do a bit of good if you didn't keep the Law. It's no more than an outward expression, a ritual if the meaning of the expression is not internalized. God intended circumcision to be a physical symbol of a spiritual reality. What God wanted was **a heart that was circumcised and obedient** in response to His will.

Outward signs and rituals are meaningless. It is a changed heart that permits a union with Christ that will allow God to declare you righteous so that you might have a ticket to Heaven. **That union is the only way we can be seen as keeping the Law.**

We'll look at this in much more detail in chapter 4.

People who have not been circumcised or baptized but who have believed the gospel message will be saved, while those who think they can earn salvation through ritual will not. The bottom line of the verses we've been looking at answers the question: "*Are you inwardly one of the people of God?*" Circumcision is the cutting away of evil from the heart. It is a renewal of the heart. Do you allow Christ to dwell in you richly (Colossians 3:16)? If you do, you don't need the praise of people, you only need it from God. I believe it appropriate that we close chapter 2 in our study of Romans by reading Psalm 51:5-17:

*For I was born a sinner— yes, from the moment my mother conceived me.*

*6 But you desire honesty from the heart, so you can teach me to be wise in my inmost being.*

*7 Purify me from my sins, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.*

*8 Oh, give me back my joy again; you have broken me— now let me rejoice.*

*9 Don't keep looking at my sins. Remove the stain of my guilt.*

*10 Create in me a clean heart, O God. Renew a right spirit within me.*

*11 Do not banish me from your presence, and don't take your Holy Spirit from me.*

*12 Restore to me again the joy of your salvation, and **make me willing to obey you.***

*13 **Then I will teach your ways to sinners, and they will return to you.***

*14 Forgive me for shedding blood, O God who saves; then **I will joyfully sing of your forgiveness.***

*15 Unseal my lips, O Lord, that I may praise you.*

*16 You would not be pleased with sacrifices, or I would bring them.*

*17 The sacrifice you want is a broken spirit. A broken and repentant heart, O God, you will not despise.*