

Sunday, March 10, 2013

HOPE RISING FROM PROMISE OF A FUTURE REWARD

Romans 2:6-11

As we approach the subject of “Rewards” in Romans 2, let me begin with a disclaimer. Some people associate “rewards” with “heaven.” Nowhere does the Bible teach that if you live a good enough life, you will receive the reward of going to heaven. There is no “divine scale” where the good is measured against the bad, and you go to heaven if the scale tips in your favor. The Bible is very clear. No one can work, earn or merit their way to heaven because no one can live a good enough life.

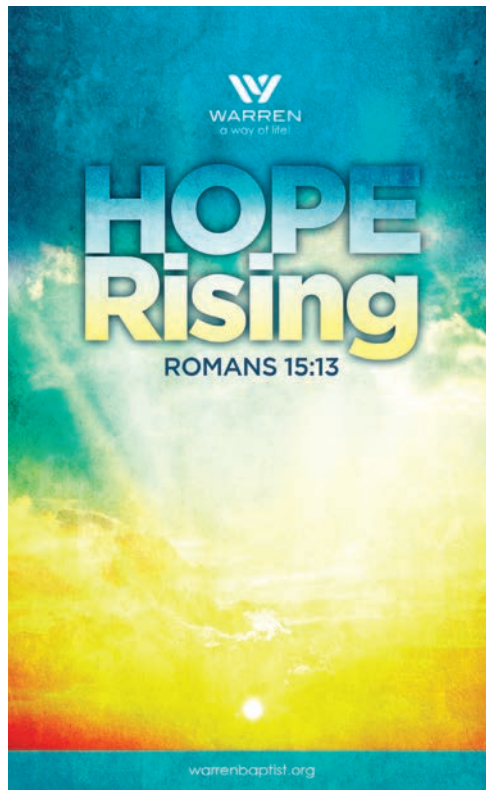
Heaven is not a reward for righteous people; it is a gift for guilty people.

If you isolate Romans 2 from other biblical passages, you might think heaven is a reward for good people and hell is a condemnation for bad people. However, in the larger context of our study in Romans, this passage has nothing to do with entry requirements to heaven.

A student making application to a college or university today has to take either the S.A.T. or A.C.T. and their test scores are logged into their file with other entry requirements. Romans 2 is not an A.C.T. test. It is not the “acts” of good things you can do to go to heaven.

Having said that, there *is* a sense in which by living out this gift of salvation, there is personal significance and reward.

“He [God] will render to each one according to his works: to those who by patience in 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” (Romans 2:6-11 ESV).

This passage is talking about the life and life style of two groups: those who are distinguished as true believers versus those who are false believers. The first group seeks to live righteous lives in order to fulfill the highest sense of God’s standard. The second group lives in unrighteousness, possibly even self righteousness, but their lives and motives do not conform to the kingdom of God.

What is this passage teaching us? Although we cannot do anything to merit salvation on our own, our lives are not without merit or lived in vain. Just the opposite. It matters to God how we live.

If you know the righteousness of God and have received His gift of grace in your life, then you want to live life to the highest level. Good works will not get you into heaven, but they will follow you to heaven.

“Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on. ‘Blessed indeed,’ says the Spirit, ‘that they may rest

from their labors, for their deeds follow them!” (Revelation 14:13 ESV).

“The dead” are believers who die physically—they are “in the Lord.” Once you know Christ, you want to live to receive an ultimate reward for living fully for Jesus Christ. True believers live for the glory and honor of Christ.

“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:8-10 ESV).

Salvation (and ultimately heaven) are a “gift of God.” No one can “boast” or be proud of a self-earned salvation. Remember, heaven is not a reward for righteous people; it is a gift for guilty people.

“Walk in them” refers to walking as a way of life, walking according to good works that are consistent with a true and living faith.

We are *saved by grace* (God’s initiative) *through faith* (our response) *for good works* (the outcome of salvation). God works in and through us so we may live lives that matter. Let me tell you a family secret:

God honors those who honor Him.

When you honor God, He honors you. As a believer in Jesus Christ, you are to live positively and progressively for the glory of God in this life.

Being a part of a church does not mean sitting in the church building. This building is not the church. This is the church house, a meeting place for the church to come together to be encouraged and equipped. We meet together essentially to be recharged, similar to your cell phone charger. The purpose of your cell phone is not to sit on the charger all day. It is to be recharged, taken and used as a mobile device. Likewise your life is intended to be a “mobile device” in this world

for the kingdom of God. And one day when you stand before Him, you can experience the affirmation and reward of having good works to His glory.

Every one of us has an opportunity to be on mission for God. A mission field doesn't have to be exotic or extreme to be important.

A mission field is anywhere you are at work to extend the Kingdom of God through the message and ministry of the gospel.

What is the message of the gospel? It is the message of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. Why that message? Because we all need a Savior.

The starting point is for people to understand they need to be delivered from sin, but the other part is the ministry of the gospel. That is what mobilizes us in service to go and touch people with the love of Christ and to give visible expression to the reality of Christ in us.

Sharing the message of the gospel and serving others is not always easy, especially on international shores where people have different cultures and languages.

Recently, one of our men made an international mission trip with us. We had the wonderful opportunity of worshipping together with the people in their church. In America, we like to have our churches full of people, but we also like space on the pew to spread out and stretch if needed.

Most often when we go to churches around the world, every seat is filled. Then when we take a mission team and add another group of people in the mix, we struggle to find room for everyone in the building.

On this particular trip, the church was full and the man had to sit on the front row as the service began to unfold in Spanish.

Since the man did not speak or understand Spanish, he didn't quite know how best to participate in worship. He decided to use the guy

sitting next to him as his guide. When he stood, the man stood. When he sang, the man sang. When he clapped, the man clapped. So far, so good.

The preacher closed his Bible and the man assumed the service was near conclusion. From the tone of his voice, the man assumed the preacher was now giving closing announcements. All of a sudden, the guy sitting next to him stood, so the man stood. The church gasped and then laughter filled the room. The man sat down in embarrassment, not knowing what had happened.

As everyone was dismissed, they smiled and patted the man on the back. He made his way to the door where the preacher was shaking hands. Fortunately the preacher also spoke English. The preacher said, "We are really glad to have you here today, but you don't know Spanish at all, do you?" The man answered, "Was I really that obvious?"

The preacher said, "Most of the service, you did pretty well, but at the close when I announced the Acosta family had a new baby, I asked the father to stand up."

It is not always easy on the mission field. But this embarrassment is nothing compared to standing before the Lord and realizing you knew about His kingdom and committed your heart to Christ, but you did not live for the kingdom of God.

God it was awkward. Lord, I wasn't sure I had the gifts. I wasn't sure You could use me. Let God be the judge of that. God has called you for service and He has a place for you. You are saved by grace through faith unto good works.

"He will render to each one according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality" (Romans 2:6-7 ESV).

God honors those and "renders" good to those who live out good works for Him.

Let me provide four things the Bible teaches about rewards and judgment.

The Judgment of God is a Reality for Each and Everyone of Us

"He will render to each one according to his works" (Romans 2:6 ESV).

Judgment is a reality. "Render" is not used here like rendering a drawing or image. *Render* actually means *payback*. The word was an accounting term in the ancient world. It meant to *payback*, *resolve debts* or *restore anything* that was due.

The Bible teaches that God is a Righteous Judge and His judgment is sure. This is not a fashionable idea in our world today. Many people only want to talk about God in terms of Friend, not Judge—His acceptance, not His expectations. Although it may be unfashionable, it is biblical. God *is* going to judge your works—not in regard to your entrance in or out of heaven, but whether you honored Him with your life.

What does the Bible teach about judgment?

• There is a Final Judgment

Revelation 20:11-15

Revelation 20:11-15 talks about the final judgment or Great White Throne Judgment. This judgment is not for believers in Christ. It is for those whose names are *not* written in the book of life. They will be eternally separated from God. But even this passage talks about the fact that the lives they have lived will be the evidence of their rebellion against God.

• Judgment Follows Death

Hebrews 9:27

"And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment" (Hebrews 9:27 ESV).

Judgment is something that will not occur in this life, but in the life to come.

• All Will Be Judged By Christ

John 5:22, 27; 2 Timothy 4:1

“The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him” (John 5:22-23 ESV).

“Truly, truly, I [Jesus] say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life” (John 5:24 ESV).

“I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead” (2 Timothy 4:1 ESV).

Here, Scripture talks about this idea of judgment and that Christ will judge all.

• There is a Separate Judgment for Believers

1 Corinthians 3:13; 2 Corinthians 5:10

This judgment is not for the entry requirements of heaven and it is not so much a judgment of punishment. It is a judgment of stewardship and faithfulness—who we are, how we live and what we have done with what God has given to us.

“Paul’s introduction of divine judgment in Romans 2 is abrupt and his assumption is that his readers recognize its reality... God’s judgment is a fact of human existence that must be reckoned with if people want to escape the realm of fantasy and live in the real world... If God does not judge a man ultimately, that means that his actions have no ultimate value, and the man whose actions lack ultimate value has little alternative but to view his life as being devoid of meaning and his existence as totally inconsequential... For if God regards what we do important enough to judge, He certainly must regard what we are as important enough to matter.”—Stuart Briscoe

Your life matters. Does God have your heart so that you are living for His glory wherever you are and whatever you do?

Salvation not only allows us to escape the judgment of condemnation that will come upon all the world, but it also allows us to stand in a judgment of commendation whereby one day, we receive rewards for the life we have lived in faith and faithfulness.

The Judgment of God Will Be Fair and Balanced

Verses 6 and 11 are like bookends to our study today: “God will render to each according to his works” (Romans 2:6 ESV), and “For God shows no partiality” (Romans 2:11 ESV).

Fox News doesn’t have a corner on *fair and balanced*. No one has a “step up” or “leg up” with God. His judgment will not be skewed; it will be perfectly fair and balanced.

Remember in Romans 2, Paul was writing to a group of people who thought they were doing pretty well. They thought they were the righteous ones, and the unrighteous were the group Paul wrote about at the end of Romans 1—immoral, idolatrous, pagan sinners. But there are no respectable sins.

Just because you are not a despicable sinner doesn’t mean you are a respectable sinner. Sinners are sinners! When it comes to judgment, God is not going to let you play the hypocrite just because you sat in church, carried a Bible and hid behind a smile. You do not gain points with God that way. There will be no partiality when you stand before Him.

When you trust God and His Word, it will be evident that you followed Him. In our court system, the burden of proof is *beyond a reasonable doubt*. But when you stand in the court of God, the judgment will be *without a shadow of a doubt*. God knows both motives and actions, and His judgment will be fair and balanced.

The Judgment of God Will Be Tangible and Measurable

This has to do with both motives and actions. God has standards of how to live morally, seeking His glory and honor in all things—literally living for the life that is to come versus those who inversely live by a different standard.

The Apostle Paul was very strong in what he had to say. The judgment of God will be measurable, tangible and distinguishable between those who truly live seeking the glory of God and those who live seeking self glory.

“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” (Romans 2:8-9 ESV).

Being a Jew doesn’t exempt you (even though you may be chosen). This applies to everyone (the Greek too) who lives for themselves rather than God.

Some people come to church and present self-righteous faces, but they are self-seeking people. Frankly, the devil doesn’t care whether he sends you to hell from the gutter or from the pew. In the end, the final judgment is punishment. So believers, live according to God’s plan and purpose.

“For we are God’s fellow workers. You are God’s field, God’s building. According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—each one’s work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though

he himself will be saved, but only as through fire” (1 Corinthians 3:9-15 ESV).

Notice there are two sets of building materials. One set includes gold, silver and precious stones (imperishable). The other includes wood, hay and straw (perishable).

What are you doing with your life? Are you living for things that are eternal, things that are tangible and measurable here on this earth? Your works may involve sacrifice, service and giving. And your works may be overlooked by others and go unrewarded, but the Bible says there will come a day when God will not overlook your works. Neither will He overlook those who have wasted their lives.

I have a tremendous burden for many, many people who will miss heaven because they never placed their faith in Christ. I also have a burden for people who have binders full of sermon notes, but whose whole life work will be burned up because they never lived to serve Christ. Build a life that matters!

The beautiful truth is not everyone may know what you are building because they do not know what is in your heart. At one time, you may have desired and aspired to be in some form of Christian service. Maybe you wanted to go to a mission field and were hindered because of health, life circumstances, family needs, etc. Have you harbored guilt through the years because you somehow felt you were never able to “go all out” for God? Do you think God doesn’t know what is in your heart?

None of us do everything we hope and want to do for the kingdom of God. But God measures both the heart and the deed. God is looking for a group of people who do not live self-seeking, unrighteous lives, but who live with the imprint of His kingdom in their hearts. Maybe God wants you to pray and be a prayer partner. Maybe God wants you to give and support. Maybe God wants you to sew or cook or serve... or go. There is a place for you! And that is a part of sharing the hope of His kingdom.

“Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God” (1 Corinthians 4:5 ESV).

The Judgment of God is Not Immediate, But Ultimate

God’s judgment is outcome-based; it is what happens in the end.

One of our tendencies is to rush judgment—to be more recognized, affirmed and successful now in what we do. But in the end, it is God whose judgment will be ultimate, though it is not always immediate.

At the turn of the 20th Century, there was an aged missionary couple traveling back to the United States after serving almost their entire married life in the remote and distant lands of Africa. At that time, airplanes were not an option for fast travel back and forth between the two continents. Missionaries basically went to the mission field and stayed there.

Through the years, this couple made tremendous sacrifices taking the gospel far from home. Now their health was broken. They had no pension plan. They were poor, tired, and frankly, they wanted to get back to their homeland of America to somehow finish life together before their death.

When they arrived at the ship that would transport them from the African port to America, they sensed a buzz of excitement about the ship. They learned President Theodore Roosevelt had been on a hunting expedition in Africa and was traveling back to America on the same ship.

Throughout the journey, everyone spoke in animated terms concerning President Roosevelt. *Did you know he is on our boat? Did you see him? Did you get a picture of him?*

All the attention was on the president, but this missionary couple just wanted to finish their journey.

As they approached New York harbor, hundreds and hundreds of people stood on shore to greet the president. The band played a celebratory march, the mayor was positioned on the platform and the flash of cameras from the press escalated as the ship neared the American port. The celebration began. The president was home from the safari!

The old, worn missionary looked at his wife and said, “This isn’t right. We have given our lives and everything we had to serve the Gospel. Now we come home and there is nobody here to meet us. There is no celebration or welcome home. It’s just us.”

The couple blended with the crowd as the president disembarked from the ship with his entourage.

That night the old missionary could still hear the cheers and shouts while he and his wife sat in their small, dingy room. He looked at the wife and said, “I just can’t get any peace about this.”

She put her hand on him and said, “Honey, don’t tell me, tell the Lord.”

He walked around the city that night and thought how many times he had felt defeated and unfruitful on the mission field. And now, he was too old to repeat or start afresh.

He came back to the room, but as he entered through the door, the wife noticed a different countenance on her husband. He did not have the slumped shoulders of defeat, but a stance of resolve and fortitude.

She said, “Honey, you seem like everything is okay. Is it?”

The old man answered, “Yes. When I left, I went for a walk and talked with God. I told Him it was unfair. I did not like us coming home with nobody here to greet us. God spoke to me and said, ‘Son, you are not home yet. You’re not home.’”

The judgment of God is not immediate, but ultimate.

I do not know what you may do for the kingdom of God and how much

recognition, acclaim, success or affirmation you may receive. You may often receive commendation or no one may say anything to you. But God sees, He knows and He cares. Be assured, one day God will reward.

Do not waste your life looking for human acclaim when you have the promise of divine affirmation.

Make the most of every opportunity to live a life of merit— not to enter the kingdom of God, but a life that will matter for God when you stand before Him on judgment day.

Lord, thank you today for Your truth, Your word and for this passage that once again gets under our skin and yet speaks to us about life and how we live it. Father, I pray You would use this day, this moment, as a time of both stirring and a time of moving in our hearts that Father, we would be a people mobilized for the sake of the gospel, a people mobilized to share hope. I pray, Father, this decision moment would have eternal consequence and I pray it in the name of Jesus. Amen.

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