

## **“GOD SHOWS NO PARTIALITY.”**

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**First Christian Reformed Church**

**May 28, 2023, 10:30 AM**

**Scripture Texts: Romans 2:6-11**

### **Prayer:**

**Prayer:** Holy Father, we call out to you this morning as a people in a dry and thirsty land who desire spiritual food and water. We are sinners in need of a very great Savior and a very present and powerful Holy Spirit. Through your Word and sacrament, fall afresh upon us and help us for the sake of your glory and your gospel. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

### **Introduction.**

Picture a courtroom scene where the apostle Paul is the prosecuting attorney. His first defendant was a Gentile, a man who was arrogant, profane, godless, sexually perverse, wicked, and unapologetic. He hates and defies all that is good. Embraces evil, fears no judgment. He is shameless in his shamefulness.

Paul pronounces the judgment, the Judge has completely given him over to impurity, to dishonorable passions and a debased mind. His sin becomes his judgment. The wrath and fury of God is on him.

Behind Paul in the courtroom is a great crowd of Jews cheering Paul on. “You tell him, Paul. Let him have it, throw the book at him. He is a terrible person who does terrible things and deserves to be judged. Give him the death penalty.”

Paul hears this and he turns around and becomes their prosecutor. That’s Romans 2. Chapter 2 makes a shift in pronouns. In Chapter 1 Paul said they. In Chapter 2 he says you and he doesn’t mean all you all, but you, and you, and you. We need to feel the weight of Paul’s words. We are the Jews, the religious people, the people who go to church and follow the rules.

Aren’t we quick to judge the terrible sins of others, aren’t we safe and secure in our own righteousness, especially compared to immoral people, those gays, those liberals, those gossips and slanders.

If the Jews thought they would get a pass, they have another thing coming. The Jews thought they had exclusive privileges as the people of God. They had

Abraham as their father and the law as their standard. To their shock and surprise Paul shows them they are just as much sinners as the Gentiles.

The Jews looked down on the Gentiles because of their gross sins. They didn't see their respectable sins as worthy of judgment.

That is how I was. I was obedient, respectful, I did what my parents said. I was not rebellious, not like lots of other kids. I was the good kid, the trouble I got into was mild compared to everyone else. My sins were respectable. I didn't think my sins were bad enough to keep me out of heaven. I didn't understand how God would deny me eternal life. I didn't know God.

### **The great divide, two destinations, vs. 6.**

Whatever else we make of this passage, let's be absolutely clear about the most important, most relevant, the most urgent issue facing each one of us. The eternal judgment of the living God and the eternal destiny of each of our souls, the great eternal divide, heaven and hell, either our eternal joy or our eternal misery.

Our consciences tell us there is right and wrong, good and evil, guilt and shame. Death reveals to us there is a judgment on sin and evil. Death came into the world because of sin, and as we are all sinners, we will all die.

When our life is over, when we die we all face a great divide, God will give us either eternal life or eternal death.

You are going to die. I don't have to convince you of that reality. Everything in creation points to it. Everything in creation says wake up and face this truth. Everything in creation also says there is a God and there is an eternal destiny that awaits us all.

Nothing matters more than where you will spend eternity after your physical death.

Does anyone lie awake at night contemplating the eternal destiny of their soul? Does anyone ponder the question, "What must I do to have eternal life?" Or the question, "What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and all the world has to offer, and lose his soul?" Or the question, "If you were to die tonight are you confident about where you would spend eternity?"

What do you lie in bed at night thinking about? What will I eat and drink, what clothes should I wear, how can I get some more money, what friends can I get

together with, what shows do I want to watch, what do other people think of me, how can I be happy, what will make me happy, why am I unhappy?

There is no more important and relevant and urgent matter in your life than your eternal life.

This is true whether you are a child, or a teenager, single or married, in the prime of life or approaching the end of a long life. We all think we will live a long life and die at a ripe old age, but there are no guarantees. Some die at five or fifteen or twenty-five or fifty.

Teenagers might be the worst at assuming they are invincible. Teenagers die all the time. Don't think you can put off thinking about eternal realities until you are sixty or seventy.

You who are in the prime of your life, living the American dream, or at least a comfortable middle-class lifestyle with all the benefits of a consumer mentality, doing what you want, going where you want, sports, videos, vacations, computers, stocks, toys, with little real taste for or interest in the things of God.

Paul wants us to tremble before a holy God who is a consuming fire. Paul wants us to stop being trivial and treating God as if He is trivial. God is not to be trifled with or mocked. Paul wants us to fear the judgment of God to wake us up out of our complacency. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Telling us this is the kindness of God.

Paul wants to stir our appetite for the things that truly matter and are truly lasting and truly satisfying.

### **Two paths, well-doing or self-seeking, vss. 7-10.**

If you will take these matters seriously, then you should be asking how can I be sure I am on the right path that will get me to the right end/goal? That is what Paul addresses in verses 7-10. Paul marks out two paths one positive, one negative, the path of well-doing and the path of self-seeking. This truth is so important it bears repeating, so Paul says it twice, first heaven and then hell in verses 7-8; and then in reverse order, hell and then heaven in verses 9-10.

The path to eternal life belongs to those who "by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality."

The path to eternal wrath belongs to those who are “self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness and do evil.”

As we read this text a bit of panic can set in, especially for good Reformed people. It sounds like Paul is contradicting himself and everything we have been taught. We have all been taught we are saved only by God’s free grace purchased and secured for us by Christ’s substitutionary sacrifice on the cross and that our acceptance with God and the forgiveness of our sins and our hope of eternal life are only by faith in Jesus and not by any works we do.

Is this a contradiction of the Gospel of free and sovereign grace? No, Paul will say in chapter 3

**Romans 3:28** A man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.

But do you know what the problem is with salvation by grace alone through faith alone? It dulls our hearts to the importance of obedience and holiness.

How many of us can quote Ephesians 2:8-9, “we are saved by grace through faith, not of works” but can’t quote Ephesians 2:10, “We are his workmanship, created for good works”?

Yes, eternal life is based on Jesus Christ. *But* those who have received Jesus by faith are given the Holy Spirit and the presence and power of the Holy Spirit is marked by *sanctification*, by transformation, by a changed heart and a changed life.

We preach the Gospel that we are justified by grace through faith in Jesus who alone saves us by His blood. And we preach the Gospel that we are being sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

The same Spirit who brings us to salvation by grace, is also the same Spirit who teaches us to say no to ungodliness, who teaches us to say yes to holiness (Titus 2:11-14).

**Titus 2:11-14** For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, 12 training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, 13 waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, 14 who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

If we say we have faith, but no works, then our faith is dead, and we are dead. It is no use to say I believe in Jesus if there is no visible, tangible fruit, no repentance, no dying to sin, no desire to worship, love, serve, give, and forgive.

Remember the verses Pastor Mike preached last week:

**Romans 2:4-5** [do you not know] that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? 5 But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath.

The kindness of God is Jesus leading us to repentance. Without repentance there is no kindness of God in your life. Don't take kindness of God for granted. Repentance is the most freeing thing in the world. The mark of a true Christian is repentance.

A repentant heart is a changing heart, a heart dying to sin, killing sin, hating sin, turning from sin. An unrepentant heart is a heart storing up wrath for the day of judgment.

Persevering in doing good and seeking for glory and honor and immortality are marks of a repentant heart that is trusting in the forgiveness of Jesus.

Paul will say this again later in Romans.

**Romans 6:22** Now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life.

Notice what is at stake, life and death. The good deeds don't earn eternal life, they are the evidence of saving faith, they are the fruit, the proof. We are justified by faith and judged by works of faith.

Saving faith always changes our lives in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Can you be a Christian if you repeatedly and unrepentantly disobey your parents, or cheat on your wife, or withhold forgiveness, hold grudges, or look at porn, or curse your neighbor, or neglect the things of God for the things of the world?

The Christian life is a life of *constant, continual repentance*, of acknowledging our lack of holiness and our desire for more of it.

A Christian is one who truly desires to live for Christ, who humbly walks in His ways. We have been praying for this since January.

**Colossians 1:10** ... walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work.

It will do us no good to say I follow Jesus, or believe in our head we follow Jesus, if our feet don't follow Jesus. The evidence of our faith will be seen in the direction of our life.

**Galatians 6:8-9** For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. 9 And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.

What are you sowing, are there good deeds, is there good fruit, is there light shining, or are we hypocrites, saying one thing and doing another? Do we say Jesus is Lord, and live like He isn't?

If you diligently plant a crop but nothing happens something is wrong. If the Word is implanted and takes root, there will be fruit. If there is no fruit, then we must question the implanting. The tree of faith is known by its fruit.

***Here is the sum of Paul's teaching.*** God judges a person "according to his works" because his works reveal who he really is; works reveal whether a person is a follower of Christ or a follower of self.

It's not enough to be religious; You can't just claim to follow God (the Jews did that). Your actions are the evidence your faith is genuine.

Good fruit is evidence a person is saved and headed towards eternal life.

Bad fruit is evidence a person is unrepentant and headed towards wrath and fury.

These two groups are two paths of life leading to the two great destinies.

### **Implications and application.**

#### ***Run to win.***

We come to heaven on the path of persevering, persistent, patient obedience.

The word here means endurance, meaning something arduous, demanding, hard, tiring, something that takes sacrifice, and a fighting against the tendency to get discouraged, and quit, give up. The work is hard and the time is long. A long obedience in the same direction.

Satan does everything he can to make the path hard, painful, unpleasant. Endurance means hard work, in the face of all kinds of trials.

How many of us have the attitude of just wanting to make it into heaven, as long as we get in we are good with that. It's like if we are in a race to get in and we come in last we are OK with that.

**I Corinthians 9:24** Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? *Run in such a way that you may win.*

Don't just run, don't just run to get in, run to win. Go for the gold, go for the glory, honor and immortality.

When it comes to spiritual things don't be lazy, superficial, lukewarm, apathetic. If you feel like that, ask God to light the fire, the change your heart.

The point of "seek glory and honor and immortality" is to want it, pursue it, crave it, love it, desire it more than you desire any earthly thing. That is the point. Run to win. Run for glory.

What do you most look forward to? What are you most eager for? Summer vacation, the weekend, a vacation, the kids or grandkids coming for a visit, the stock market to go up?

Ask God to give you that same desire or eagerness for glory, honor, and eternal life. What is eternal should have your earnest interest way more than any temporal, earthly thing. Eternal life is given to those who seek it, not to the spiritually indifferent.

Is your faith real, alive, active, dynamic, put into practice? Are there examples of charity and generosity in your life?

When was the last time you served someone else? When was the last time did you set your agenda or needs aside and helped someone else? Change a diaper, do the dishes, help a neighbor, even a stranger, lend a helping hand, open your wallet, open your home, serve in the nursery, made a meal for someone else, say yes to someone's request of help, or better yet see a need and volunteer without being asked.

Parents, help your children with this. As a family you can start a project or a tradition that puts your family's faith in action. Sponsor a ministry or missionary.

Visit the care home. Join those who pray at Planned Parenthood the third Sunday afternoon of each month. Collect coins for a good work.

What we don't want is for our children to stand up here and make a profession of faith that has no fruit and does them no good. Teach them the Christian life is a life of repentance and active growing obedience and works of love.

Love God and love those around you in tangible ways that reflect the Spirit in you.

**Prayer:** Holy Father, this word from your Word is far too important to be ignored or casually dismissed. Our souls even today stand on the brink of eternity and we are rushing toward your day when we will stand before your judgment seat. Father, I beg you to stir every one of our hearts to a right judgment of our standing with you now so none in the hearing of my voice will hear, "I never knew you, depart from me" but will rather rejoice to hear, "Well done, my good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your master" (Matthew 25:21).