

GOD SHOWS NO FAVORITISM

Romans 2:6-16

When I was a boy I liked to make things fair. Now when I say "fair," I don't mean equitable and just. I mean that I didn't want someone to have *more* than me. Things had to be equal, what I thought of as *fair*. For example, when my friend Tom came over we would often share a bottle of Coke. Do you remember those skinny, 16 ounce Coke bottles? There is nothing like drinking an ice cold coke out of those bottles! So Tom and I would come in the house all sweaty from playing in the hot sun. I would crack the cap off of that slender bottle and proceed to pour out the contents into two glasses. Now you can guess what I did next, can't you? I never used a ruler, but I did eyeball the tops of each glass to make certain that Tom never got a drop more Coke than me. To me, that was fair!

Of course it wasn't fairness at all, was it? It was nothing more than extreme childishness and selfishness. If truth be told, we all still think this way at times. We like things to be fair--to be equal, so that others don't have more or better than us. We can become jealous of the obscene salaries of corporate CEO's and professional athletes. But making it very personal here, I don't think Aaron Rodgers is getting paid too much, what about you? :-)

Maybe we aren't jealous of the super wealthy and talented, but we want fairness in other ways. I can remember when Ryan was playing soccer on the JV team in 8th grade and I said to Karen, "Why did the coach pull Ryan out?" and then a few minutes later, "Why isn't the coach putting Ryan back in?" Can you relate? We want our kids to be treated fairly. If you have brothers and sisters at home, then almost every day is a new quest for fairness. She's got more than me! It's **my** turn to sit in the front seat! Hey, don't hog all of the potato chips!

What we are doing is taking our jealousy and selfishness and cloaking it in a righteous package called 'fairness.' We have fooled ourselves into thinking that we are seeking a justice and fairness when we are really seeking self. and worst of all, we begin to apply this twisted sense of fairness to God. J.I. Packer has some probing insight into this topic.

What do people mean when they say God is unfair? They mean, first, that he does not seem to take account of the worth of particular human beings and, second, that he does not appear to distribute or withhold benefits according to what people deserve. Behind this

two-fold complaint lies the assumption that under ordinary circumstances God owes us the life that we think of as good-comfortable, pleasant, pain-free-and that no one should receive from him less than this (save those whom we recognize as socially obnoxious). That assumption, in turn, rests on the idea that as our Creator may tell us our duty to him, so we his creatures may determine his duty to us, and that as God may judge us in an executive way if we fail to obey his laws, so we may judge him intellectually by forming an opinion as to whether he has given us what he owes us or not.¹

How do we fight this temptation to doubt God's fairness? One way is to dig into His word and remind ourselves that God does not show favoritism.

6 He will render to each one according to his works: 7 to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; 8 but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. 9 There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, 10 but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. 11 For God shows no partiality.

For all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law. 13 For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified. 14 For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. 15 They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them 16 on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.

The first six verses form a helpful pattern that is not immediately evident upon first reading. The pattern looks like this. First, there is a premise-- *He will render to each one according to his works*. Next, there is a statement about those who do good. Then there are two statements about those who do evil, followed by a statement about those who do good. Finally it ends with a second premise, which is essentially a restatement of the first premise.

A-Premise: God will render to each one according to his works
B-Good: well doing --> eternal life
C-Bad: do not obey truth --> wrath and fury
C-Bad: those who do evil --> tribulation and distress
B-Good: everyone who does good --> glory and honor and peace
A-Premise: God shows no partiality

Can you see the pattern? It forms an A-B-C-C-B-A pattern. The last three of six statements form a mirror image of the first three. The two A's are mirror images, likewise the two B's and the two C's are mirror images of one another, stating the same idea in a slightly different way. This is a rhetorical device often used by the Biblical writers for emphasis. Let's begin with the premise.

6-He will render to each one according to his works.

11-For God shows no partiality.

Putting these two together we have the premise that God shows no partiality because he renders to each one according to his works. Part of our task this morning is to figure exactly what this means--to render according to our works. Ripped out of its context, it sounds like some kind of works based theology; that if we work hard enough, God will accept us. Taken this way, it would not be all that different than the concept of karma we looked at last Sunday.

It gets trickier still when you add in verse thirteen. *For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified.* Now here we have a really important word in the book of Romans--justification. To be justified is to be made righteous. remember, this is the theme of the entire book of Romans: *the righteous will live by faith* (1:17). so how is it that Paul could say here that the doers of the law will be justified?

First, let's be crystal clear--no one is saved by doing good works. Paul emphasizes this point all throughout this book and nowhere is it more clear than in 3:20. *For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.*

So let's compare these two verses side by side.

- *For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the **doers of the law** who will be justified.*
- *For by **works of the law** no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.*

"Works of the law" do not justify a person but "doers of the law" do bring about justification. Therefore we must conclude that these two phrases, though very similar, do not mean the same thing. That would be a blatant contradiction. Something so sloppy as this would have been impossible for a writer as careful as Paul. We know what "works of the law" are. For the Jew, it would be a matter of following the ceremonial part of the law. For everyone else it is an attempt to earn salvation through good works.

So then what did Paul mean by "doers of the law"? First of all, in its immediate context, Paul is making the comparison between a hearer of the law and a doer of the law. So a doer is one who takes action. In this case it is a person who takes action in regard to the law. "Doers of the law" is similar to what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 7:19. *Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but what matters is the keeping of the commandments of God.* In the same way, Jesus said, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15). We don't read Jesus' words and think, "If I work really hard, then God will love me. If I obey his commandments, then he will accept me." That would be a fatal falling into the works of the law.

Paul is saying the same thing that James, the brother of Jesus said.

Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness"—and he was called a friend of God. You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone (James 2:21-24).

Evangelicals tend to get a little uncomfortable with this section of Romans and this section of James. We do not like to link justification and works together because we know that elsewhere Paul argues vigorously against it. The entire book of Galatians argues in this way. But here we have both Paul and James saying nearly the same thing.

Let's dig into the James passage for a moment. First James quoted from Genesis 22 and the story of Abraham offering his son Isaac on the altar. James summarized this event stating that Abraham's "faith was completed by his works." But immediately after this James quoted from Genesis 15, the famous passage where Abraham expressed faith in God's promise to provide an heir and to make Abraham into a mighty nation. As a result of his faith, God credited righteousness to Abraham. In other words, Abraham was justified by his faith. He did not do any works to receive this act of justification.

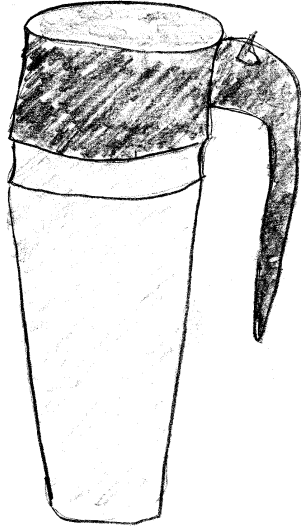
Therefore, the act of sacrificing Isaac on the altar came as a result of his saving faith and was evidence of his saving faith but it did not save him. This, then, is what Paul meant by a "doer of the law"--one who does good works as a result of his saving faith and as evidence of his saving faith. If you merely hear the commandments and do not obey them, this is evidence that a person does not possess saving faith.

Saul gives us a good definition of what disobedience looks like. I don't mean Saul before he became Paul, but rather King Saul in the Old Testament. God commanded Saul to utterly destroy the Amalakites but Saul only partially obeyed. He left all of the best animals alive for his own selfish use. When Samuel approached Saul, he replied, "Blessed be you to the LORD. I have performed the commandment of the LORD" (1 Samuel 15:13). After Samuel confronted him, Saul still boasted of his innocence saying, "I have obeyed the voice of the LORD." Finally after Samuel confronted him a second time, Saul freely confessed, "I have sinned, for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord and your words, because I feared the people and obeyed their voice" (1 Samuel 15:8).

Notice carefully why Saul disobeyed--*because I feared the people and obeyed their voice*. You will always follow that which you fear. If you fear people and seek their approval, you will follow them into the depths of depravity. This is the unfortunate foundation of peer pressure. The power of peer pressure is fear of men and the seeking of their approval. If you did not fear them, you would never follow them. If you did not seek their approval, their pressure would never bear fruit. If you fear God and seek his commandments, then no amount of pressure could ever move you.

So getting back to Romans 2, we can start to better understand how Paul could write, *the doers of the law who will be justified*. Those who "do the law" are those who obey God's commandments. Those who obey commandments are those who fear the Lord. And those who fear the lord are those who have been justified by faith. This is all that James and Paul are saying--the fruit of a saved person is that they obey the commandments of God.

This answers the question about God's fairness. *He will render to each one according to his works* and *God shows no partiality* because these "doers of the law" perform these works



because they have been bought with the precious blood of Christ. In other words, God saves you out of sin and then empowers you to do good works and then judges you on whether or not you did these good works. Now I call that fair.

let's say I was going to enter an art contest with my little gem to the left. Sorry, but the artist gene obviously skipped me! If I was to enter such a contest, the judges would render a decision based on my works, and that would be a problem! What I would need is for someone to give me Rembrandt painting and allow me to call it my own. So when I was judged "according to my works" my works would be in a real sense, not my own. The same is true with our good works. God has removed our own sinful works and through salvation and Holy Spirit empowerment, substituted his good works. Is this is fair? If fairness is what you seek, then this is completely unfair. How is it fair that I am judged by someone else's good works? If you insist on using your standard of fairness, then no, it isn't fair at all--from God's perspective. But from our perspective it is just pure mercy and grace. it is mercy in that we are not judged by our sinful works and it is grace in that we are judged by the merits of Christ.

But that's not to say that there is no effort required on our part. *6 He will render to each one according to his works: 7 to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life;* This is a fascinating verse for two reasons. First, it speaks in generalities. It doesn't tell us to love, or how to love or exactly how to treat one another or what kinds of good works we are supposed to be actively doing. Two, it does tell us to *seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life.* How in the world do we do these things.

First of all, let's get past the idea that seeking glory, honor and immortality is somehow a selfish act. If you removed this idea from the Bible, do you realize what that would sound like. if I told you that my life goal is to seek glory and honor, what would be your opinion of me? You would naturally conclude that I was the most selfish, arrogant person whom you have ever met. After all, only the most conceited person would actively seek glory and honor, right?

Now some of you might be thinking, "Well this obviously means that we are seeking after God's glory and God's honor, not our own." I can relate to that opinion because again, it seems so unnatural and selfish to seek after glory and honor. However, verse ten tells us that this is actually our glory and our honor. *There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, 10 but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good.* In the same way that tribulation and distress will be give to the unbeliever, so glory and honor will be given to the believer. Let's not forget immortality and peace as well.

Furthermore, we know that seeking glory and honor and immortality, is NOT self-seeking because this is the opposite of v. 8--*but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth.* Therefore, in what sense is it not selfish to seek glory, honor and immortality? It is not selfish because these are the rewards that God has planned for us. Now before I said that it is not God's

honor and glory that we are to seek but our own. I believe that, but I also believe that they are inseparable from one another. Listen to how C.S. Lewis spoke of glory and worship.

We can't—or I can't—hear the song of a bird simply as a sound. Its meaning or message (“That’s a bird”) comes with it inevitably—just as one can't see a familiar word in print as a merely visual pattern. The reading is as involuntary as the seeing. When the wind roars I don't just hear the roar; I “hear the wind.” In the same way it is possible to “read” as well as to “have” a pleasure. Or not even “as well as.” The distinction ought to become, and sometimes is, impossible; to receive it and to recognize its divine source are a single experience. This heavenly fruit is instantly redolent of the orchard where it grew. This sweet air whispers of the country from whence it blows. It is a message. We know we are being touched by a finger of that right hand at which there are pleasures for evermore. There need be no question of thanks or praise as a separate event, something done afterwards. To experience the tiny theophany is itself to adore.²

I think we will be so caught up in the wonder of God's glory that it will itself be part of our reward. it is like standing at the edge of the Grand Canyon. As you gaze at the colors and grandeur of this massive canyon, do you imagine yourself to be the greatest person who ever lived? At that moment, do your thoughts turn to all of your accomplishments and gifts? of course not. Right then you don't have any thought of yourself but instead, you are enthralled with the breathtaking artistry before you. But in so doing, the "glory" of the Grand Canyon is a reward to you. In its beauty, you find enjoyment. In its allure you find glory and honor. In traveling to see the Grand Canyon you would be seeking glory and honor.

I had the same experience when I watched [this video](#) about scales on the wings of butterflies. Watching this increased my worship of God even though he never once mentioned God. By the way, the man who runs this Youtube channel is also a believer. All of his videos end with a Bible verse and a picture of Reepicheep from C.S. Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia*. As a Bible believing Christian, when I watch this, I don't think about myself. I think about the elegance and order of something as simple and overlooked as a wing of a butterfly. But in so doing, I am rewarded by it. seeking something outside of myself gives me pleasure and we could say "glory." As Lewis said, We know we are being touched by a finger of that right hand at which there are pleasures for evermore."

This reminds me of my chiropractor's testimony he told me this past week. In his college years he excelled in athletics and academics and being raised in Catholic church and schools, he at least knew some moral teaching. As a result, he had all kinds of success and he prided himself on being a good person. He would paint an old woman's house for free, that sort of thing. He had accumulated some pretty significant good works. He was much better than the average guy and he knew it. He was doing what the law required without really knowing the law. Then a man challenged him to start reading the Bible. The he was in a Bible study with this guy for a while and learned that he wasn't really so good after all. The law began to show him his sin. But he moved away and didn't study the Bible anymore, but his conscience was never clean. The law stayed with him and even though he didn't stop doing certain behaviors, he did feel constant guilt about it. Until one day a new patient asked him the Evangelism Explosion question: If you died

tonight, do you know if you would go to Heaven or Hell? He knew the answer to the question and within a few minutes, he professed faith in Christ alone for his salvation.

Now he does good works as a result of his faith, not to prove to anyone that he is a good guy. As a matter of fact, he mentioned once that he did paint the home of a retired couple. But he does these good works out of the overflow of his faith.. He is seeking glory and honor.

What are you seeking after? What has captured your heart? You and I will be judged for our works. But our works are not our own but rather flow from a faith that was given to us. This is not fair, is it? No it is not because it is all mercy.

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¹ J.I. Packer, *Modern Reformation, Is God Unfair?*, Sept./Oct. 2006 Vol. 15 No. 5, pp. 16-22.

² C.S. Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm*, p. 86.