

No Partiality

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[0 : 0 0] You may be seated. Good morning. My name's Matthew Capone, and I'm the pastor here at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church, and it's my joy to bring God's Word to you this morning.

A special welcome if you're new or visiting with us. We're glad that you're here. And we're glad that you're here not because we're trying to fill seats, but because we're following Jesus together as one community.

And as we follow Jesus together, we become convinced that there's no one so good, they don't need God's grace, and no one so bad that they can't have it, which is why we come back week after week to hear what God has to say to us in His Word.

This morning, we're continuing our series in the book of Romans. You'll remember that the book of Romans is a letter written by the Apostle Paul in the 50s A.D., and it is called Romans for a very simple reason, which is that it's written to the churches in the city of Rome.

This letter is about the gospel. It's about the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection. And Paul's hope, as we saw back in verse 11, his hope in writing this letter, is that they would be established in the gospel, that they would be strengthened in it more and more.

[1 : 1 8] We're going to explore many different topics in this book, many applications, but there's a special focus on the mission and the unity of the church. And while there are many spokes, many little side quests we're going to go on, they are going to return constantly to the hub of the gospel.

And we're continuing in Romans chapter 2. You'll remember, as I mentioned earlier today, there's this larger argument that's happening between chapter 1 and chapter 3, the main point of which is that everyone is a sinner.

Chapter 1 is telling us Gentiles are sinners. Chapter 2 is telling us Jews are also sinners. Chapter 3 is going to bring it all together and remind us if we miss anything of that truth again.

There's a lot happening in this passage this morning in verses 5 through 11. And so in many ways, we're just going to be able to skim the surface of what Paul is telling us here. And we're going to focus really on one thing, which is the danger of presuming on religious identity or activities.

The danger of presuming on religious identity or activities. Paul here is warning Jews who think that, hey, just because I'm a Jew, I'm right before God.

[2 : 3 5] And so it's with that that I'm going to invite you now to turn with me in God's Word. You can turn in your Bible. You can turn on your phone. You can turn in your worship guide. No matter where you turn, remember that this is God's Word.

And God tells us that His Word is more precious than gold, even the finest gold. And it's sweeter even than honey. Sweeter than honey, even honey that comes straight from the honeycomb.

And so that's why we read now Romans chapter 2, starting at verse 5. Verse 8.

to his works. To those who by patience and well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. Verse 8, 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.

I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's Word. Our Father in heaven, we do thank you and we praise you again that you haven't left us as orphans alone in a merciless universe, but that you have given us your Word and you've spoken clearly to us. And so we ask simply this morning that you would do that by your Holy Spirit, that you would help us to see and understand and believe everything you've written for us in your Word. And most of all, you would help us to see Jesus Christ in all His power and glory and authority and majesty and mercy and grace and love.

[4 : 42] We admit this morning that we haven't earned or deserved any of these things, so instead we simply ask for them in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen. You may be aware that for the last year or so, since the summer of 2023, Harvard University has come under enormous pressure, and this pressure has been a push, a movement for Harvard to end what is called legacy admissions. And legacy admissions is simply a fancy way of saying it is a lot easier to be admitted to Harvard if your parents also went to Harvard. In 2020, 14% of students entering Harvard University had parents who had also gone to Harvard University. And so part of the protest over this is that relationships appear to be more important than performance or merit. Privilege maybe isn't given to those who have earned it or deserved it, but instead those who come from the right family. And so there's this argument that on the one hand, this hurts us as a society, and it may even go against what Harvard claims that it stands for. I mention this because as we come to this portion in Paul's argument in Romans, remember Romans chapter 1 was highlighting the fact that Gentiles, those who are not Jews, deserve God's wrath and punishment. Chapter 2 is turning from Gentiles to Jews and saying, look, the same thing is true of you all. And the reason Paul has to bring this up is because Jews of his day thought that when it came to God and his kingdom, there was in fact legacy admissions.

We're Jews, so of course God is going to bless us, right? Jewishness is enough. It's the Gentiles who need to worry about that judgment stuff. It's the Gentiles who need to be concerned about their standing before God. We don't have to worry about anything. Jews are God's people, right? We have favor, and so we can do what we want. We don't need to worry. That, by the way, is the reason that Paul says in verse 9, there will be tribulation and distress, the Jew first and also the Greek. Paul is saying, oh, you think you have preference? You think you come first as Jews? Guess what? You're going to come first when God's judgment falls. And so that's the background here. That's the problem that Paul is dealing with. And in this passage, then he is saying emphatically, look, there is no legacy admission for Jews. It is not that God is coming with his judgment and his wrath on the Gentiles, but that you're going to get a pass because of the ethnic group, the religious group that you belong to.

That is why, and I'm going to jump to the end of the passage here, that is why verse 11 says, for God shows no partiality. In what sense does God show no partiality? We might say, by the way, that's the point of these verses. He shows no partiality in the sense that he does not give special treatment, special preference to Jews. They don't get to skip the line, right? There's no TSA pre-check when it comes to God's judgment. No, they both, Jews and Gentiles, stand before God in the same way. In other words, no partiality means this. You're not getting a pass because you're a Jew.

You're not skipping the line because you're a Jew. And it's part of this larger argument that Paul is making that sin is universal. Remember the quote last week from the Russian author, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, where he says, the line separating good and evil passes through every human heart.

Now, you might be thinking at this moment, well, that's great, Matthew. I'm glad that Paul had to deconstruct that idea in the Jews' minds. I'm actually not a Jew. So this has truly no relevance to me.

[9 : 08] There's a larger principle here, though, that Paul is making that applies to us as well, which is this. Group membership, belonging to the right party, belonging to the right group, will not save you. Group membership, especially religious group membership, will not save you.

Calling yourself a Christian, going to church every Sunday, does not mean you have true faith. Hanging out with Christians does not give you a pass. Being in religious groups, participating in religious activities does not make you a child of God. It's the principle for us this morning is this, God will examine your life to see whether you have true faith. God will examine your life to see whether you have true faith. If it is not group membership that makes you a child of God, what is it? What's the answer? Well, Paul tells us here in verse 6, he will render to each one according to his works. Now, you may hear that word works and red flags are going off in your mind, right? No, it's not. Works don't matter at all, right? It is justification by faith in Christ. So why is Paul bringing up this idea of works? If you have those red flags, that's legitimate. We're going to come back to that. Before we come back to it, though, I want to look with you at verses 7 through 10.

In verses 7 through 10, Paul very simply says, there are two ways to live. There are two ways to live. The first way to live here is in verse 7, those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality. Now, we could go into the meaning of each of those words and dig deep this morning. We don't have time for all of that, and so I'll simply say this. Paul is saying there are a group of people who live towards heaven. There are people whose desire more than anything else is for God's approval.

They want God's approval more than man's approval. They want heaven more than they want this earth. That is what consumes their heart and their desire and their passion. They want to be present with God.

They want life and peace with God. Then when we talk about heaven, you might think of this sort of sentimental place where there are angels playing harps. The Bible actually presents us with something very different. Heaven is the place that is free from sin and disease and evil and sickness.

[12 : 06] And not only is heaven the place that is free from all of those things, heaven is the place where we are finally and fully with God. We're able to experience the level of joy and intimacy and connection that we can only dream of in this life. And so that's one way to live. This person longs to be with God.

This person loves what God loves, and they hate what God hates. That's one way to live. Paul tells us in verse 8, there is another way to live. There are some who live for heaven. There are also those who live for themselves. He says that very explicitly. Those who are self-seeking.

Self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness. And that self-seeking phrase there is key. They may do many good things, this person who lives away from God. They might do many things that we would find praiseworthy, that would read extremely well in an obituary. The problem is this, though.

None of those things are directed towards God and His kingdom. At their heart, those things are self-seeking rather than God-seeking. And so this person's heart is pointed in the wrong direction.

There are many things necessary for a work to be truly good and right and pleasing in God's sight. One of those things is that they're done for the right reasons. Nothing that this person does is for the right reason. They are self-seeking. And so there's consequences for each. We're told in the very next verse, for the person who's self-seeking, there will be wrath and indignation. That wrath and indignation will lead to tribulation and anguish. In other words, the person who seeks life apart from God gets life apart from God. The person who seeks hell, which is the definition of life apart from God, will get hell.

[14 : 37] That will be the end of their story. When we think of hell, often we have the wrong idea about that as well. Hell is not going to be this place where you and your buddies are finally free of the goody-good religious people and you get to drink beers together. Often people will say, man, I'm glad I get to go to hell. I'll be there with my friends. Paul tells us it's actually going to be very different from that. Hell is going to be an active punishment. We will be experiencing God's wrath and punishment.

Not only is it this active punishment, but it's going to be a separation from everything that's good. There are all sorts of things that you experience in this life that are a wonderful gift from God, whether you believe in Him or not. Matthew chapter 5 says, the rain falls on the righteous and the unrighteous, which is Jesus' way of saying, hey, you're going to experience God's blessings now whether you acknowledge Him or not. You're going to get the gifts regardless of what you think about the giver. In hell, that will no longer be true. All goodness, joy, peace, happiness will be removed. It will be not full and final presence with God. It will be separation from the goodness and blessings of God.

Then in verse 10, He tells us how the first person's life will end. They're going to get glory and honor and peace. In other words, that person's going to experience heaven.

That person will get what it is that they've been looking forward to, what they've desired. We could say it this way, the person who seeks heaven gets heaven. And so there's this great irony here as Paul lays out these two ways to live because he's really saying this, everyone is going to get what they want. Those who are self-seeking and want to live life apart from God, those people are going to get life apart from God. Those people who are living towards heaven and that's what they long for and desire, that is what they're going to get. The people who want life with God are going to get God.

Everyone is going to get what they want. Matthew chapter 6, Jesus Himself tells us the same thing. Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things will be added to you.

[17 : 22] And so there's one primary question that comes out of this passage and it's this. It's from verses 7 and 8. What are you seeking?

What are you seeking? Paul tells us we're seeking something. We're going to have to choose. Verse 7, those who are patient, they seek for glory and honor and immortality. They are seeking heaven. Verse 8, there's the other people. They are self-seeking.

Notice that Paul does not give us a third option. Those are the directions that a human life can take. He's raising another question here. What do you want?

And then verse 6, does your life show that you're a Christian? In other words, does your life show that you want heaven?

What does your life reveal about what you're seeking? Is there evidence that the same power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead, that that same power is at work in you?

[18 : 32] Is there some indication that that's true of your life? Or are you presumptuous? Do you think being part of the right religious group is enough?

And so you coddle your anger and you nurse your wounds. You live for power and lifestyle and safety.

You live a life based around your pleasure and your consumption. And as you go about that life, you do things. Maybe you do good things, right?

But you do them for yourself. As you raise kids, are you doing that so that you look good? Or are you doing it because you have hope in the future of this world because God is a good God? What's your reason? What are you seeking after?

[19 : 34] Paul is warning us. He's saying, look, don't presume. Don't presume on being a church member. Don't presume on being baptized. Don't presume on saying a prayer five or 20 or 30 years ago.

When it comes to the end of time, God is not going to want you to hear you say, look, I'm good. I was a member at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church. I believed the right things.

I checked the right boxes. I was on the right team. And then I lived life for myself. And?

Where's the proof, right? Where's the proof that you've been redeemed, that God saved you? Does your life show that you love what God loves and you hate what God hates? Not that you're perfect.

Not that you believe that salvation is based on works. But instead that you do in fact have a new life. That you are in fact a new creation in Christ.

[20 : 38] That you did at one time have a heart of stone and that was really and truly and fully changed to a heart of flesh. And if you think this is just an invention of Paul, I'd remind you that not only is this taught throughout Scripture, it's taught by Jesus himself.

Jesus gives us this warning, Matthew chapter 7. In other words, there are people who claim Christ.

There are people who show up to church every single Sunday. But they are living for themselves. They're self-seeking.

When I was growing up, preachers would ask, Hey, if you were accused of being a Christian and you were brought to court, would there be enough evidence to convict you?

Paul's actually not posing that as a hypothetical. He's saying there is going to be a day. There's going to be a day when God looks at everyone's lives. He's going to say, Is there evidence that you had true faith?

[22 : 01] Older generations would call this self-examination, the process of looking at your life and saying, Man, is God actually at work here? Do I have reason to believe that what I confess is actually true?

Jesus tells us the same thing again in Matthew chapter 16. If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

For whoever would save his life will lose it. But whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. Man, that sounds an awful lot like being heaven-focused, self-focused.

Whoever would save his life will lose it. But whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. Christian, what are you seeking?

Are you seeking glory and honor and immortality? Are you living towards heaven?

[23 : 15] Or are you self-seeking? What does your life show? Calling yourself a Christian is not enough.

Now, I promised you we would get back to verse 6. If red flags went off in your head because of that, this is your moment. Okay? You might be thinking, Matthew, what do you mean?

Doesn't that contradict salvation through Christ alone? Isn't the point of chapters 1 through 3 that no one is righteous, right? That all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

Aren't you contradicting the doctrine of justification by faith alone? The concept here is one that's not taught very often in my experience in the church, but is all throughout Scripture, and it's this.

There is no justification based on works. There's no salvation based on works. There is a judgment based on works.

[24 : 24] There's no justification based on works. There's no salvation based on works. There is a judgment based on works. In other words, at the end of the age, the book of our lives will be opened.

And the question will be, was this the life of a Christian? Was this the life of a Christian?

Yes, we believe in justification by faith alone, in Christ alone. Does this life show that this person had faith alone in Christ alone?

Martin Luther said this, at least people say he said this, We are saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves is never alone.

Those that God saves, he sanctifies. Put another way, this is on page 7 of your worship guide. To find acquittal from God on the last day, there must be evidence flowing out of us that grace has flowed into us.

[25 : 37] Page 8 of your worship guide. Because those who are justified by faith alone are also sanctified by the Spirit of Christ, the final judgment will confirm that the justified were not saved by a faith devoid of any fruits.

There is not a justification based on works. There is no salvation based on works. There is a judgment based on works. Paul tells us even more bluntly and directly in 2 Corinthians 5.

He says, And again, Jesus teaches the same thing.

One of the most famous passages on the resurrection, John chapter 5, John Stott points this out. Jesus breaks people not into those who are saved and those who are not saved, although ultimately that is the category, but he talks about those who have done good and those who have done evil.

These are Jesus' words, John chapter 5. An hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out. Those who have done good to the resurrection of life.

[27 : 01] Those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment. Some people say that the job of a preacher is to disturb the comfortable and to comfort the disturbed.

And so if you're feeling a little disturbed this morning, that's good. That's actually the feeling Paul wants people to have as they're reading verses 5 through 11.

Right? You have people who are very comfortable. These Jews who think, My religious identity is enough. My Jewishness is enough. I've checked the right boxes.

That's all that matters. And Paul's trying to rattle them a little bit. He's trying to shake them and say, No, wake up. What does your life reveal about your heart? So if you're comfortable, I hope you're disturbed.

If you're disturbed, I want you to be comforted. We don't walk away from this passage thinking, Man, I've really got to pull myself up by my bootstraps.

[28 : 06] I'm not sure if I meet this standard. And I've got to get really busy doing good works for God. No, actually one of the things we learn, I think it's Matthew chapter 26.

Jesus talks about the sheep and the goats. The sheep are actually surprised that they were doing the right thing. They didn't realize that's what was happening. Right? Because God's work, his spirit was at work in them.

And the comfort also comes from Jesus. Remember John chapter 15, Jesus says, Look, there's actually nothing good that can happen apart from me. He compares himself to the vine and he says, Abide in me and I in you.

As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me.

How is it that some people are seeking for glory and honor and immortality? They abide in the vine. They have God's spirit at work in their lives.

[29 : 06] Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit. For apart from me, you can do nothing.

When Jesus talks, John chapter 5, about those who have done good, how have they done that good? They've abided in the vine. Apart from Jesus, they were able to do nothing.

And so the comfort is this. Christian, God sanctifies those he saves. Notice who's active in that verb.

God is the one sanctifying. Jesus tells us, John chapter 10, he's not going to lose anyone who's been given to him. My sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me.

I give them eternal life and they will never perish and no one will snatch them out of my hand. If God's at work in your life by his spirit, he's truly saved you.

[30 : 15] If you are seeking glory and honor and immortality, no one and nothing can snatch you out of God's hand.

There is no justification by works. There is no salvation by works. There is a judgment by works.

And so that leads us to our final song, which talks about giving our whole lives to Christ. Not one piece or another piece, but all of the pieces. Take my life and let it be. Talks about giving our life, our hands, our feet, our voice, our lips, our silver, our gold, our intellect, our will, our heart, our love, our whole person.

And it reminds us of our helplessness. The hymn does not say, I take my life and I let it be. No, it's a request. Take my life and let it be.

Consecrated, Lord, to thee. Take my moments and my days. Let them flow in ceaseless praise.

[31 : 22] Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, we do praise you and thank you that not one of your sheep will be taken from your hands.

We thank you for telling us what's true, even when it's hard. We ask that you would, by your spirit, cause us to abide in you more and more. That you stir up our love and our trust in you.

That we would seek for honor and glory and immortality. That we would live lives that are pointed towards heaven. We ask all these things in the mighty name of Jesus Christ.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.

[32 : 20] Amen. Amen.