

Hebrews 6:9-12
God's Justice Is Not So Unjust to Overlook Our Works and Love

I. Intro -Review

- A. The past couple of weeks we looked at what the author of the book of Hebrews described as the sluggishness and immaturity of the Hebrew Christians. They came to a point in their faith – the beginning of their life in Christ – and then just seemed to flounder. He goes through the section in Heb 6:1-8 where he issued threats and also promises to get the Hebrews up and going again.
- B. Now in our text this morning he says that he is confident that the Hebrews will not be like the vine discussed in 6:8 that is cursed and burned. He has better hopes for them than this. And he believes this because:
 - 1. Of the promises of God which we will read about in 6:13.
 - 2. And then what he mentions in our text this morning. He says that God is not so unjust to overlook their works and love which they showed to the saints.

II. Now we are all Protestants – Presbyterians – and Evangelicals. So when we hear that God is not so unjust to overlook the works of the Hebrews we might quickly dismiss that whole idea because we know that salvation is by grace through faith. We might be so inclined to believe that our works play no part in God's **judgment** of us. It is all grace.

- A. Now, before we just jump to that conclusion, let's look at a few passages of Scripture.
 - 1. Matthew 16:27 - For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done.
 - 2. Romans 2:6-11 - 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, 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.
 - 3. 2 Cor 5:10 - For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.
 - 4. Rev 14:13 - And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write this: 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!"
 - 5. Rev 20:12 - And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done.
 - 6. And there are others, but I think this is enough to see that the Bible says that God is going to judge each person – "we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ" to receive what is due – for what we have done in our life. There is no exemption here. All people will be judged on the basis of what they have done.
 - 7. And we affirm that when we gather around at the gravesite of our brothers and sisters who have died and the pastors places his hand on the casket and pronounces the words of Committal which echoes John 5:29 and the phrase from Revelation – "We commit the body of our brother/sister to grave waiting the day when Christ returns

and the trumpet sounds and we are all raised from the dead. Those that have done evil to rise and face judgment and those that have done good will rise to experience eternal life. Be sure of this our works do follow us.”

8. On judgment day, our works do play a part. The author of the book of Hebrews reminds his readers of this.
9. And our works play a part because, as our author reminds us, God is just. He is not unjust.

III. What is justice?

- A. Justice – to give a short answer - is getting what you deserve. That is as old as the Old Testament. It is affirmed in the New Testament in the verses above. If you have done evil – that is you have lived contrary to certain moral principles – then you are deserving of punishment. If you have done good – lived according to certain moral principles - then you deserve to receive some good.
 1. That is the ancient understanding of justice. Some more modern philosophers such as Immanuel Kant and John Rawls believe that a just society is not one that looks for people to live according some moral principles, but rather a just society is one that allows people to freely choose what they believe to be the good. This is where the idea of individual rights come into play.¹
- B. Regardless of which of these two ideas of justice a person holds onto – the Bible is consistent. It teaches us that we will all appear before the Lord to be judged for what we have done.
- C. Now given that, there is the tendency in each of us to create our own ideas of what is just – of what is right and wrong. We kind of like to create our own standard and think of ourselves as living up to that standard in some acceptable way. “I am not as bad as so and so”. “I have not done such and such and I have done some good things.” We have this idea that if we live according to a certain code then we are ok. (And in this code we might cut ourselves some slack that maybe we don’t cut others).
 1. We have all heard people say that when they die and they stand before the Lord that they are going to make their case and they are going to be ok with God. They lived up to their code.
 2. That is the way the Pharisees thought in Jesus’ day. They kept God’s code. And they did it better than anyone else. And then Jesus told them – what about murder? They all thought they were clear. They never killed anyone. But Jesus says that it is more than that. It involves your heart. Have you ever hated anyone? That is murder. Have you ever lusted? There is adultery there.
 3. God is going to judge us on that judgment day – not simply by a code of laws. And certainly not by some code we feel is sufficient - “I have lived up to my expectations.”

IV. I mentioned last week a video I watched by a Harvard professor, Steven Pinker, Can Science Tell Us Right From Wrong? In this video he talks about why religion – particularly Christianity cannot tell us right from wrong. He goes back to the argument of Plato² and says it is a knock down argument against Christianity.

¹ Michael Sandel, Justice, p.9

² https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_sJ9YFGP8vw&t=314s and Plato Euthyphro

- A. He asks, “Is an action right or wrong because God says it is wrong or does God say an action is right or wrong basically because he is appealing to some standard of right and wrong?”
 - 1. If you go with an action is wrong because God says it is – then why did God say it is wrong? Is it just a whim? Some arbitrary decision? If so, then he could have gone either way on anything. He decided it was wrong to rape and torture, but he could have gone the other way and said it was ok to do that.
 - 2. Or if you go with the idea that God is appealing to some standard of right and wrong and his decisions are not capricious/arbitrary then just skip God and go straight to that standard.
 - B. Well, those are challenging objections. How is God going to judge us? Is it based on some arbitrary idea of right and wrong that God has? Is it based on some external code of right and wrong that God looks at to determine what is good and evil?
 - 1. Pinker did not go far enough with Plato. He neglects one of Plato’s big ideas. That idea is Plato’s theory of forms. Plato’s theory of forms says that this world is not the real world. This world is but a shadow of the reality that lies above us. Ultimate reality is beyond us. (We talked about this earlier with Plato’s cave analogy.)
 - 2. We will get a taste of this in Hebrews when we get to the sanctuary. The heavenly sanctuary is the real sanctuary. The earthly one was only a shadow.
 - 3. Our understanding of right and wrong is a shadow. Ultimate right and wrong exists, according to Plato, beyond our earthly existence.³
 - C. Plato got it right. He just did not know what that form of ultimate was. We do. Paul did as he entered Athens and sees all their gods and then begins to tell them about the true God who made them and will one day judge the world in righteousness. (Acts 20:30)
 - D. Right and wrong are not arbitrary decisions of God. God does not consult some code to see what is right and wrong. God is by nature good. God is by nature holy. God is by nature just. God does not just tell us what good is. He is goodness himself.
 - 1. If we want to know what good is – we don’t look to a code. We look at God himself.
- V. Judgment Day
- A. So on judgment day when we stand before God we will not be standing in judgement of some code written down or some code we concocted for ourselves. We will be standing before God in all of his goodness and holiness and perfections.
 - 1. The Bible in Revelation says that on that day there will be silence for 30 minutes. I think the silence will follow God asking this question: “Do any of you all have anything to say in defense of your life?” And when we are standing there before Goodness and Holiness – all of our defenses will be gone. And we will all stand in silence.
 - B. And is it at that point that Jesus does as Micah 5 says he will do. He stands up and pleads our case. He pleads his death upon the cross for our sins. And as I John 1:9 says, God is faithful and just and will forgive our sins because **Jesus bore them on the cross and they got what they deserved through his suffering and death.** Justice was made on that day.
 - 1. I loved in Paradise Lost how quickly God accepted Jesus’ plea for us and put those who believe in Jesus in the clear. It was one sentence.

³ See CS Lewis Christian Reflections p. The Poison of Subjectivism p. 79

2. J I Packer in Knowing God says this of the Day of Judgment: “Run from God now and you meet him as Judge on that day. Seek him now and believe and you will find his Son to be your Savior.”
- VI. Now our text seems to be talking about **another judgment for Christians**. He is pressing them to maturity and faithfulness. He remembers their good works and their love for their brothers and sisters. And he says that God is not so unjust as to overlook this.
- A. Here is where James and Paul come into play.
 1. Paul says we are saved apart from works. And we know what he means. Our **salvation** is not dependent upon our works. It is not our works that saves us but Jesus’ death and his good works make us right in God’s sight.
 2. And then we have James who says that faith without works is dead. Once we profess faith in Christ Jesus there should be some evidence of that faith. And part of that evidence is seen in our works.
 - a. Take your Bible and read I and II Timothy and Titus and highlight the number of times that Paul encourages Timothy and the church there in Ephesus and Titus on the island of Crete (they did not have the best reputation) to do good works. Do that and you will see what Paul thinks of good works. They follow salvation in the life of a believer.
 - B. And here in Hebrews the author encourages them on to good works and love for one another and tells them that the things they do will be seen by God and be given their just reward.
 1. Now I will be honest here. I don’t know exactly what those rewards will be. Hebrews says we will inherit the promises of God (Heb 6:12). Exactly how that inheritance will be dispensed, I don’t really know.
 2. J I Packer (I had the privilege to meet him one time in college – funny story for another time. The Lord called him home last week.)...Packer says this about the rewards: “it is beyond our power to know”.⁴
 3. When the Scripture speaks of them it is in symbolic and picturesque language. It is not specific.
 4. I told Gwen one day that there are not many people I don’t like, but then I named one that I just don’t like. She told me when we get to heaven we will no longer be married and things will be different (and I could tell what she was thinking – I will not have her kindness there like I do here in my heavenly mansion.). Instead, God might stick me in a mansion with that guy I don’t like. That will be my reward.
 5. I don’t know. But here is what I do know. My mom cross stitched this verse for me when I was in high school. I Cor 15:58 – those who labor in the Lord do not labor in vain.
 6. Exactly what the reward is. Exactly how God’s justice will dispense his grace to us on account of our works in the Lord, I don’t know. We will have to wait and find out. But until then, we grow, we labor in the Lord, we seek to serve him and love others and do those good works that follow our salvation in Christ Jesus.

⁴ Knowing God pg. 133