

Romans 2:9-11

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As believers, we have the choice to follow God and pursue His will, thus storing rewards, glory, and honor for us in heaven. Or, we can do the opposite and incur tribulation and distress on our soul.

Verse 2:9 is a continuation of 2:8 and the two should be considered together. The Greek word translated *tribulation* here is “*thlipsis*,” which is also translated “affliction.” The word translated anguish is “*stenochoria*,” also rendered “distress.” Both words are used by the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 6:3–5 to describe difficult circumstances he encountered such as imprisonment, beatings, and other anxious, difficult circumstances. So it seems clear there will be discomfort at the judgment seat of Jesus for selfish ambition, which is the characteristic being evaluated from 2:8, or evil deeds as here in 2:9. *There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek* (v 9). This discomfort of *tribulation and distress* appears to apply to all humanity, Jews as well as Greeks, believers as well as unbelievers.

That experience of discomfort for believers at the judgment seat can also be observed in passages such as 1 Corinthians 3:12–17, where the Apostle Paul states to the Corinthian believers that any of them who builds on the foundation of Jesus Christ with wood, hay, or straw will see those things burned up in the fire of Jesus's judgment. This will be uncomfortable, for deeds done on earth that are burned up are experienced as “loss.” It is expressed that such a person will be “saved, yet so as through fire.”

This negative experience for believers is contrasted with the positive reward from building with gold or precious stones—deeds that fire refines and makes more precious (1 Corinthians 3:14). In each case, the believer’s eternal judgment related to their relationship as a child of God is not in question, for the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable (as we shall learn in Romans 11:29). However, the deeds we do on earth will only receive lasting *glory and honor* from God if we serve others (v 7). The process of judgment will be, for a time, highly discomfoting for many.

Historically, Christianity has, in the main, held that our time on earth is a time of purification, and necessary for preparation to live in a perfect world where all sorrow ends. C. S. Lewis reflected that entering eternity with lessons not learned would make us unprepared to fully enjoy eternity. We aren't told much about how this will operate, and speculation on this topic has led to much dispute. However, it is emphasized throughout scripture that any suffering or discomfort we endure here on earth will be positively repaid many times over at the judgment of Jesus, in ways we can barely imagine, and any comfort we offer ourselves on earth through selfish ambition will bring a discomfort many times greater than whatever we avoided on earth (1 Corinthians 2:9).

Jesus Himself referred to this principle many times, such as in Matthew 19:29 where He says anything we give up in this earthly life to serve Him, He will repay "a hundredfold." An earthly investor could only dream of an investment that would return a hundred times the original investment, but this is a guaranteed outcome in God's spiritual economy.

Referring once again to the theme verse of Romans 1:16–17, the just life lived by faith is not only the best life to live in this present world, as it avoids the adverse consequences of Romans 1:18–32, it is also the life that will benefit us most for eternity.

The Greek word translated *soul* in the phrase *There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil* (v 9) is "*psuche*," which is translated "life" about half the time and "soul" the other half, and simply means a living human person.

There are three primary Greek root words translated "life" (noun) or "live" (verb):

- "*Psuche*": the root for our word "psyche" appears 105 times in scripture and is translated "soul" about half the time and "life" the other half (occasionally along with "mind" or "heart"). Depending on context it refers to our time on earth or an aspect of the human makeup that includes our conscious reality.
- "*Bios*": the root for our word biology is translated "life," "living," and "good" and is used to refer to the means and activities of living, like our word "livelihood"—the activities by which we stay alive and derive meaning from daily existence (1 John 2:16).
- "*Zoe*": the root of our words "zoology" and "zoo" is usually translated "life" and often refers to the quality of our physical life experience (2 Corinthians 4:10-11), and/or the quality of our spiritual experience of life (John 3:16; Romans 2:7).

Continuing the sentence that begins in 2:5, Paul repeats the notion of a positive reward for living a life pointed at pleasing God by living a life of service to others. In 2:7, the reward is "eternal life," a life experience that is completely fulfilling; eternal life is a gift when received (John 2:14-16) as well as a reward when experienced (Galatians 6:8, 1 Timothy 6:12).

Here the expressed reward is *glory, honor, and peace* from God *to everyone who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek* (v 10). In 2:7, glory and honor from God is what a believer is seeking to obtain by patiently continuing to do good. In verse 10, *glory and honor* is bestowed as a reward for *everyone who does good*, along with *peace*. In the modern age, we might think of *peace* as peace of mind, or perhaps solid mental health. This would tell us that having an external focus is the key to experiencing mental health.

There is a difference between Romans 2:7 and 2:10 that is also interesting. In 2:7, the believer seeks "glory and honor" from God along with "immortality" or "incorruption." In 2:10, God grants His *glory and honor* but, in place of "immortality," *peace* is granted as a reward. Here *peace* is the same word used by Jesus in John 14:27 where He pronounces His *peace* upon the

disciples in place of fear. Since Paul tells us to approach the Judgment of Christ with great fear (as in 2 Corinthians 5:10–11), it is of great comfort to know that one of the rewards for a life lived for God by doing good to others is to experience His peace.

Loving and serving others is a lot of trouble and requires a daily sacrifice of setting aside self. It also requires patiently waiting, deferring gratification (1 Peter 5:6). In Romans 2:5–10 God asserts that living a life of service to others not only avoids negative consequences that attend a self-seeking life, but also accumulates eternal benefits that transcend anything we can even imagine (1 Corinthians 2:9).

The Apostle Paul asserts that every human will stand before God and be judged for the deeds he or she did while on earth, and uses the phrase to *the Jew first and also to the Greek to describe all of humanity* (vs 10). This seems to indicate that the Jews will be judged first. However, the main point here is that everyone will be judged using the same approach: *For there is no partiality with God* (v 11).

God will not play favorites, each person will be judged appropriately, according to what they did with what they had. In fact, Jesus states in Luke 12:48 that to whom much is given, much will be required. So, since the Jews have much, as we shall see in Romans 3:1–3, their standard might be higher. But God will be just, since He is just.

Biblical Text

There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek, but glory and honor and peace to everyone who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For there is no partiality with God.