

Romans 2:9

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile;

Analysis

Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil—θλῖψις (thipsis, "tribulation/pressure") and στενοχωρία (stenochōria, "anguish/distress") are visceral terms for suffering. Ψυχή (psychē, "soul") emphasizes the personal, conscious experience of judgment—not annihilation but conscious torment. The present participle κατεργαζομένου τὸ κακόν (katergazomenou to kakon, "working/practicing evil") indicates habitual, unrepented sin.

Of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile—Paul's phrase Ἰουδαίου τε πρῶτον καὶ Ἑλληνος (Ioudaiou te prōton kai Hellēnos) appears throughout Romans (1:16, 2:10). Πρῶτον (prōton, "first") carries chronological and covenantal priority: Jews received revelation first (Romans 3:1-2), thus face judgment first. Greater privilege brings greater accountability (Luke 12:48, Amos 3:2). Ἑλλην (Hellēn, "Greek") stands for all Gentiles.

This verse devastates Jewish presumption: far from escaping judgment, Jews face it first. The universality of judgment—"every soul"—demolishes any claim to exemption. Jesus taught identically in Luke 12:47-48: the servant who knew his master's will but didn't do it receives greater punishment. Covenant knowledge intensifies, not diminishes, moral responsibility.

Historical Context

"To the Jew first" reflected salvation history: God chose Abraham, gave Torah to Moses, sent prophets to Israel, and brought the Messiah through Jewish lineage. Jews naturally interpreted this priority as favoritism guaranteeing salvation. Paul reframes it: priority in revelation means priority in judgment for those who reject it. This echoes Jesus's pronouncement against Chorazin and Bethsaida (Matthew 11:20-24)—cities that witnessed His miracles faced worse judgment than pagan Sodom.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. How does my spiritual privilege—Christian upbringing, biblical teaching, worship opportunities—increase rather than decrease my accountability?
2. What 'evil' do I habitually practice while presuming God's patience means approval?
3. If judgment falls 'first' on those with greatest light, how should this motivate my faithfulness?

Interlinear Text

θλῖψις καὶ στενοχωρία ἐπὶ πᾶσαν ψυχὴν ἀνθρώπου
Tribulation also anguish upon every soul of man
G2347 G2532 G4730 G1909 G3956 G5590 G444

τοῦ κατεργαζομένου τὸ κακόν Ἰουδαίου τε πρῶτον καὶ
G3588 that doeth G3588 evil of the Jew and first also
G2716 G2556 G2453 G5037 G4412 G2532

Ἐλληνος·
of the Gentile
G1672

Additional Cross-References

1 Peter 4:17 (Parallel theme): For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?

Ezekiel 18:4 (Parallel theme): Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die.

Acts 3:26 (Parallel theme): Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.

Romans 1:16 (Parallel theme): For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

Romans 2:10 (Parallel theme): But glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile:

Luke 24:47 (Parallel theme): And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

2 Thessalonians 1:6 (Parallel theme): Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you;

