

Romans 2:12-16

God's Righteous and Impartial Judgment, pt. 3

Every person on the face of the planet has a view of God's judgment

- Ask anyone and he will tell you what he thinks will happen on Judgment Day

Even though there are a myriad of different opinions, there can only be one correct answer

- I am grateful that God's Word tells us what will happen

We have the truth of God from the Word of God

- We are not left to uncertainty

In Romans 2, Paul is discussing this very subject of judgment

- We have already noted how God's judgment is righteous and impartial
- He is not shady, biased, or distorted in His judgment

We are assured that as believers, we will never face the terrifying reality of God's wrath and fury over sin

- We will, of course, face His discipline when we sin
- But we will never face His wrath

Unbelievers, on the other hand, will face His wrath over sin

- God's patience and kindness will be exchanged for His holy hatred of sin
- This is the penalty and punishment for sin

This morning, we continue to study Romans 2

- A passage that deals with judgment and universal condemnation, regardless of whether one is a Jew or Gentile

Let's read Romans 2:1-16

In Romans 2, the apostle Paul is making some rather strong statements against the unbelieving Jew

- This was needed since the Jews thought of themselves as especially privileged by God
- Some of the Jews thought that they would escape the judgment of God through their family tree and/or their religious accomplishments

The unbelieving Jew had little or no regard for God's patience and kindness

- Little did he realize that God was withholding judgment so that the unbelieving Jew could repent

Last week, we noted how the judgment of God will be contingent upon a person's deeds

- How a person lives tells a lot about his convictions
- How a person lives tells a lot about his spiritual nature

In Romans 2:9, the apostle stated that the judgment of God will begin with the Jews

- They were the covenant people of God
- They had been given great spiritual blessings
- *Yet, they remained stubborn and unrepentant in their hearts, refusing to submit to God*

So judgment was inevitable

- Judgment for the unbelieving Jew
- Judgment for the unbelieving Gentile

But how will God judge the Jews and Gentiles?

- These two groups of individuals are polar opposites in many ways

The Jews were the people of God

- The Gentiles were not

The Jews had been the recipients of the written revelation of the OT

- The Gentiles didn't have access to the written Scriptures

So how would God judge these two groups?

- Would there be two different standards of judgment?
- How can God hold the Gentiles accountable when they didn't have the Law?

In Romans 2:12-16, the apostle Paul gives three more aspects of God's righteous and impartial judgment

- God's judgment falls upon those who possess the external Law (2:12-13)
- God's judgment falls upon those who possess an internal law (2:14-15)
- God's judgment falls upon everyone through the Person of Jesus Christ (2:16)

I. God's judgment falls upon those who possess the external Law (2:12-13)

¹²For all who have sinned without the Law will also perish without the Law;

Last week, Paul explained that God's judgment will be impartial

- God's judgment will be based on an individual's deeds
- That unbelieving individual will have no one to blame but himself on Judgment Day

Throughout the book of Romans, Paul divides humanity into two groups

- Jews
- Gentiles

The Jews were the covenant family of God

- They were given tremendous spiritual blessings throughout the OT

The Gentiles, on the other hand, were not the covenant family of God

- In the words of Ephesians 2:12, they "**were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world**"

The contrast could not be greater

- The Jews were very familiar with the covenants
- The Gentiles were not familiar with the covenants

So how would God judge both of these groups?

- This is one of the questions that I trust will be answered by the time we leave here this morning

The apostle contrasts two people groups in verse 12

- One group is "**without the Law**"
- The other group is "**under the Law**"

Notice that in both groups, the issue of sin is the same

- Individuals in both groups “sinned”

The first group describes the Gentiles, who didn’t have access to the OT law

- The second group describes the Jews, who did have access to the OT Scriptures

Also notice that in both groups, there are consequences for their sin

- The Gentiles who sinned will “perish without the Law”
- The Jews who sinned would “be judged by the Law”

If you think about it, the Gentiles were not required to obey the Law of God

- The OT Scriptures were written for the nation of Israel
- They were to be a distinct nation, separate from other nations

The Gentiles who sinned are said to “perish”

- The idea behind this word is something which is ruined and therefore is no longer usable for its intended purpose¹
- This word is frequently used of the eternal destiny of the wicked
- “For the word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1 Cor 1:18)

Paul is not advocating the heretical teaching of annihilation or soul sleep²

- This is the view that upon death, the soul of the unbeliever does not experience pain or punishment

But the Scriptures are consistent that the unbeliever will experience eternal punishment after physical death

Probably the most famous and most quoted Bible verse is John 3:16, “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life”

- The believer will not perish, but have eternal life
- The unbeliever will perish and suffer eternally

Ignorance of the Law of God will not save the Gentile from the judgment of God³

and all who have sinned under the Law will be judged by the Law;

The Jews are described as those “who have sinned under the Law”

- They had access to the OT Scriptures
- So their sin was all the more condemnatory, since they knew what God expected and continued to disobey

Because they sinned in light of the Law, they would be judged by the Law

- They would have no excuse for their sin

The mere possession of the Law of Moses did not equal eternal security

- The Jews has erroneously believed this lie

¹ John MacArthur, Jr., *The MacArthur NT Commentary, Romans 1-8*, 137.

² Donald Grey Barnhouse, *God’s Wrath*, 73.

³ Alva J. McClain, *Romans: The Gospel of God’s Grace*, 77.

As the Judge, God would use the Law as the instrument and means of justice

- “(the law) is not a charm guaranteeing salvation. On the contrary, it means condemnation for those who have it and do not obey it”⁴

Everyone will be judged according to his response to the revelation he has given him⁵

- The Gentile didn't have the Law; therefore, they would not be judged by the Law
 - o However, the Gentile would be judged according the amount of light they had received
 - o They would be condemned since they didn't act in accordance with that light
- The Jew, on the other hand, had been given the Law; therefore, he would be judged by the Law
 - o They would be condemned since they failed to obey the Law that God had given to them

The Gentile doesn't perish because he lacks the OT Law

- The Gentile perishes because he has sinned⁶

This doesn't exonerate the Jew, however

- He will be judged more strictly since he possessed the written Law of God

The cities of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum were the places where many of Jesus' miracles took place⁷

- Yet the individuals in these cities refused to believe in Jesus Christ as the Messiah
- Jesus concluded that it would be better for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for these cities

Clearly, the issue was one of accountability and responsibility

- Those who were shown much should have been the more eager to submit and believe

So it was with the Jews of Paul's day

¹³ for not the hearers of the Law are just before God, but the doers of the Law will be justified.

But the Jews could speak up and object to what Paul is saying

- The Jews thought that the mere possession of the Law of God was a safeguard against God's judgment

We remember Jesus' dealings with the Pharisees throughout the Gospel accounts

- The Pharisees knew the Word
- But they didn't obey its teachings

The Pharisees prided themselves on how much they knew

- But they missed the necessity of applying the Word of God to their lives

Paul tells us here in verse 13 that it is not “the hearers of the Law” who are just

- It is “the doers of the Law” who will be justified

What Jesus said to the Pharisees in the Gospels is what Paul is saying to unbelieving Jews here in Romans 2

- It doesn't matter how much you know of God's Word
- It matters how much of God's Word you are internalizing and applying in your life

⁴ Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 122.

⁵ Morris, 122-23.

⁶ Everett F. Harrison, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Romans*, 30.

⁷ MacArthur, 138.

James issues a similar warning in his epistle, "But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.²³ For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror;²⁴ for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was.²⁵ But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man shall be blessed in what he does." (Jas 1:22-25)

- The contrast is between a "hearer" and "doer" of the Word

Imagine looking at yourself in the mirror, seeing yourself as messy, untidy, and unfit to go out in public

- Consider how foolish it would be to look at yourself in this condition, then to conclude, "I look ok to go out on a date with my spouse!"

But imagine looking at yourself from a spiritual perspective

- You see glaring sins that are unconfessed
- You see habits that are not God-honoring
- And yet, you conclude, "I am ok."

This was the mindset of many Jews

- They didn't compare themselves with the standard of God's Word
- They compared themselves with other sinful humans, oftentimes the Gentiles!

The Jews were content with merely hearing the Word

- They weren't focusing on being a "doer" of the Word
- James tells these individuals that they have deceived themselves!

Merely hearing God's Word has no advantage without obedience⁸

- As a matter of fact, hearing God's Word causes you to become more accountable for your actions

The Jews could not claim salvation simply on the basis that God had given him the Law

- He hasn't obeyed the Law!⁹

How sad it will be for many to stand before the Lord one day, thinking that they are doing ok spiritually

- In reality, they are eternally lost, having never experienced the salvation that God offers

This is why Paul is so strong in this section dealing with the Jews

- They had the OT Scriptures
- They knew what God expected
- Yet they continued to sin anyway

In verse 13, Paul writes, "for not the hearers of the Law are just before God, but the doers of the Law will be justified"

- Once again, we have to keep in mind that Paul is in a context of condemnation
- Paul is not dealing with salvation at this point of the epistle

Before the apostle tells the good news of salvation, he must give the bad news of condemnation

Paul is not saying that a person could somehow be justified through the Law

- He clearly refuted that idea in Romans 3:20, "because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight"

⁸ William R. Newell, *Romans: Verse-by-Verse*, 63.

⁹ Morris, 121.

The very purpose of the Law is stated in Galatians 3:24, "Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, that we may be justified by faith"

- The Law was like a hard taskmaster, punishing us for our wrongdoings
- The Law pointed to our need for Jesus Christ
- It was never intended to be a means of justification

James 2:10 records these words, "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all"

- It would take a perfect man to be righteous from the Law

There was only one perfect Man, the Lord Jesus Christ

- He fulfilled the Law perfectly, never breaking a single command

Friend, you either have to be perfect or you must have the perfect Man, Jesus Christ, fulfill the demands of the Law for you

- Option 1 is ruled out since we are all sinners

Sinner friend, your only option is to trust in Jesus Christ

- He alone can provide you forgiveness of sin

What Paul is stating is that a person who has been justified will prove to be obedient to what God's Word says

- He will be a "doer" and not merely a "hearer"

We have covered the first aspect of God's righteous and impartial judgment as addressed in this section

- God's judgment falls upon those who possess the external Law (2:12-13)
- But there is a second truth that Paul addresses

II. God's judgment falls upon those who possess an internal law (2:14-15)

¹⁴For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves,

We have already seen this morning that God will judge the Jews by the Law

- They had access to the OT Scriptures
- Therefore, this would be the basis of their judgment

But what about the Gentiles?

- How would God judge them?
- Could God be righteous in holding the Gentiles accountable to the standard of the Law which they didn't possess?

This passage has been used by some to indicate that God will lower His standards of judgment for those who have never heard the Gospel

- In other words, some affirm that God will allow certain individuals to go to heaven – even though they had never heard the Gospel

But that would be a double standard

- And this entire section of Romans 2 deals with God's righteous and impartial judgment

So Paul begins in verse 14 by speaking of the Gentiles

- Even though they didn't possess the Law, they oftentimes acted in a manner that reflected the truths of the Law

Gentiles don't always do what is right

- But sometimes they do

When the Gentile does what is right (as defined by the Law), he is keeping part of the Law's provisions

- But in no way does this merit favor from God

“the Gentile is not really outside the sphere of law, though he is of course outside the sphere of the law of Moses”¹⁰

- He doesn't have the Law of Moses
- However, the Gentile is still subject to the principle of law

The result of this was that they were still held accountable for their actions

- Even though they didn't have the written Law, their actions established the reality of an internal code of ethics

Granted, the written law of God is not available to the Gentiles of Paul's day

- Yet the Gentiles were not totally void of knowledge of what is right and wrong
- Verse 15 continues this thought

¹⁵ in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts.

How can God hold the Gentiles responsible when they don't even have the written Law?

- Verse 15 states that the actions of the Gentiles “**show the work of the Law written in their hearts**”

When God created Adam, He said, “**Let Us make man in Our image**” (Gen 1:26)

- Even after the Fall and the Flood, mankind is still said to bear the image of God (cf. Gen 9:6)

Part of being in the image of God is that we can identify with God's perfections, of which justice is included

- We are far from the state of innocence of Adam
- However, we still bear the reality of God's image

Notice something very clear in this verse

- Unbelieving Gentiles are not said to have the Law written in their hearts
- They are said to have the work of the Law written in their hearts

In the prophecy of Jeremiah, God did promise that the Law would be written on the hearts of believers in the New Covenant (cf. Jer 31)

- However, Paul is addressing unbelievers in Romans 2

In actuality, the unbeliever has four (4) witnesses which will serve to prove his guilt on Judgment Day

- Creation (Ps 19; Rom 1:20-21)
- The work of the Law written on their hearts
- Their conscience
- Their thoughts

¹⁰ Morris, 125.

If you to travel around this world, you would see a lot of differences

- But then again, you would see many similarities

Many governments that are clearly opposed to the teachings of Christianity readily affirm some of the same basic truths from the Bible

- Penalties for breaking the law
- Protection for the poor and the weak

How can this be?

- Some of the basic truths from the law of God are evident to everyone
- Moral and ethical requirements which are generally recognized

Think about these questions

- Why is murder wrong?
- Why should crimes be punished?
- Why does everyone realize that there is a right and wrong (even though they differ on the specifics)

God has put some basic truths into the heart of every individual

- Though they are not trying to obey God's written Law, Gentiles sometimes do the things required by the Law¹¹

their conscience bearing witness,

Did you realize that the Old Testament doesn't have a word for conscience?

- The idea of conscience was borrowed from a Greek audience and culture
- It was not a Hebrew concept

The Jews of the OT had the written Word of God

- The Greeks had their conscience

“the function of conscience in the Gentile is parallel to the function of the law for the Jew”¹²

- They both served as a basis of judgment
- They both served to evaluate actions

One writer refers to the conscience as “a resident police officer”¹³

- It doesn't make the rules
- It simply convicts us when we do wrong

It is reported that a tribe in Africa had an unusual but effective way of testing the guilt of an accused person¹⁴

- The suspects would line up and the tongue of each individual would be touched with a hot knife

If saliva was on the tongue, the blade would sizzle but not cause much pain

- But if the tongue was dry, the blade would stick and create a horrible burn

¹¹ Morris, 126.

¹² Harrison, 31.

¹³ Alan F. Johnson, *Everyman's Bible Commentary, Romans*, 54.

¹⁴ MacArthur, 141.

The tribe knew that oftentimes guilt would cause a person's mouth to become dry

- A seared tongue was the proof of guilt

Consciences can differ in sensitivity, based on the degree of knowledge a person has

- The sensitivity of a conscience can depend on whether or not the conscience is obeyed or resisted

If you are a person who continually sins when you know it to be wrong, then you are ignoring your conscience

- The alarm bell of your conscience is being ignored, to your own spiritual detriment

and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them,

The very thoughts of an unbeliever assault him on a regular basis

- His thoughts either accuse him or defend him

These two terms, “**accusing...defending**” were legal terms

- They were used in a courtroom setting for bringing charges in court¹⁵

So the Gentile cannot plead ignorance

- Creation, his conscience, his thoughts, and the work of the law all testify against him

Deep down within the Gentile, there is a witness to what is right

- His thoughts – some accusing and some defending – give further witness to the fact that there is a right and wrong

God didn't leave the Gentiles entirely without a testimony concerning God

- Remember Psalm 19:1, "**The heavens are telling of the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring the work of His hands**" (Ps 19:1)

But the Gentiles have refused to acknowledge God's witness in creation

- "**For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse**" (Ro 1:20)

Once again, the Gentiles will perish not because they lack the Law

- The Gentiles will perish because they have sinned

We have seen two aspects of God's judgment

- God's judgment falls upon those who possess the external Law (2:12-13)
- God's judgment falls upon those who possess an internal law (2:14-15)

III. God's judgment falls upon everyone through the Person of Jesus Christ (2:16)

¹⁶on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus.

We are familiar with the Old Testament account of Samuel selecting a new king

- Samuel saw Eliab's appearance and height
- He was convinced that Eliab was the right man for the job

¹⁵ Morris, 128.

But God rebuked Samuel and told him, "Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Sa 16:7)

- Samuel was looking at the outward appearance
- God was looking at the heart

This same scenario repeats itself countless times in our lives

- We can only look at the outward appearance
- We can't know a person's motives
- We can't see what God sees

How often we are tricked and deceived by looking merely at the outward appearance

- But God is never tricked

I remember the first time that someone told me about God knowing my thoughts

- My brother told me that God knew every thought that crossed my mind
- I thought he was kidding

Outwardly, I was "good"

- I had never drank alcohol or smoked or did drugs

But inwardly, I was very sinful

- My thoughts were of lust and anger
- My motives were not always God-honoring

To be honest, my brother's words were terrifying!

- That God would know my innermost thoughts was very scary

But that is precisely what Paul states in verse 16

- "God will judge the secrets of men"

In 1 Corinthians, Paul writes about this issue of God knowing his heart

- The apostle wasn't aware of anything sinful in his life at the time of his writing 1 Corinthians
- But notice what he says about someone examining his heart

"But to me it is a very small thing that I should be examined by you, or by any human court; in fact, I do not even examine myself. For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord. Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God" (1 Co 4:3-5)

- Paul realized that another human's evaluation of him would be biased, incomplete, and potentially wrong
- Paul postponed the act of "passing judgment" until Judgment Day when the Lord Jesus would "bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts"

On that great Judgment Day, God will unveil all secrets

- Everything will be out in the open
- No one can hide from God's omniscience

Daniel was not only able to tell Nebuchadnezzar his dream

- Daniel was able to interpret that dream correctly

How could Daniel do this?

- Simple!
- God knew the thoughts of the King!

Spyplanes can fly at extremely high altitudes, out of human sight, taking pictures of individuals

- Those individuals don't realize that they are being watched

Doctors use x-rays, CT scans, and MRI's to look deep within the human body

- We can't see broken bones, cancer, tumors, or polyps inside our body cavities
- But these medical tools can see what the human eye can't

But sometimes spyplanes are not looking in the right place at the right time

- They miss key information

X-rays, CT scans, and MRI's are not perfect

- Technicians make mistakes
- Machines make errors

But friend, God's eye never blinks

- His judgment will be perfect and complete

God can see inside your mind

- He knows your secrets
- He knows your motives
- He knows your thoughts

The awesome reality is that you can't hide anything from God

- He knows you better than you know yourself

In John 5:22, Jesus said that God the Father, "**has given all judgment to the Son**" (Jn 5:22)

- You will have to face the judgment of the One whom you have rejected for so long

The bottom line is that Jesus Christ is the final basis for judgment

- His judgment is righteous and impartial

When Paul addresses the men of Athens, the apostle concluded, "**Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead**" (Ac 17:30-31)

Sinner friend, you now know that you can't fool God

- He knows everything about you

You are left with two choices this morning

- You can reject Jesus as Lord and Savior – you will suffer eternal punishment for your decision
- You can receive Jesus as Lord and Savior – ask Him to change you, forgiving you of your sin

On Judgment Day, no one can say, "This isn't fair! I didn't know any better!"

- For the unbelieving Jews, they will be judged by the Law
- For the unbelieving Gentiles, they will be condemned on the basis of creation, conscience, thoughts, and their own human standard of judgment

All humans are without excuse

- We are all sinners, worthy of God's wrath and judgment

The only way of salvation is through His Son, Jesus Christ

- Won't you trust in Him right now?