

Romans, Part 10 6-19-22

Judgment & The Gospel

Romans 2:11-16 *For there is no partiality with God. ¹²For all who have sinned without the Law will also perish without the Law, and all who have sinned under the Law will be judged by the Law; ¹³for it is not the hearers of the Law who are just before God, but the doers of the Law will be justified. 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, ¹⁵in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them, ¹⁶on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus.*

So, let's supposing Jan Muzyn here was driving around singing praises to Jesus when she sees in her rearview mirror a police car with the lights flashing. Uh-oh. Jan pulls over and the officer walks up to her car and says, *Tell me mam, do you know the speed limit on this road?* Jan says, *Yes, Officer, it is 40mph.* The policeman says, *That is correct. You were going 58, but as long as you know the speed limit you are in good shape?* Is that how that conversation goes down? I don't think so. And how likely is it that the policeman says to Jan – *Our records show that you are of Irish descent and a member of North Park Church, so, hey, no worries.* Nope, at least I hope not. Justice does not work that way. The criteria for judgment are not found in what you know or in what groups you are a part of. It is about behavior. This is what Paul is driving at in the first four verses we look at today. Really, this morning you are getting two sermons --- Excited? But, not to disappoint you, they are two short sermons – the first from verses 12-15, the second focused on verse 16, with a look back at verse 11.

From 12-15 the apostle is clarifying some important points about our future judgment. Three things to see. The first is that it is about doing, not knowing. Behavior over understanding. In verse 13 he says that hearers of the law don't get justified, but only the doers of the law. Jan's awareness of the speed limit is a nothing-burger. The just law-man is assessing her behavior in the light of the law. That may seem obvious to us, but the Jews to whom Paul wrote thought otherwise. There was this presumption that, because they were Jewish, because they attended synagogue and heard the law, because they were members of a privileged group, they would be accepted by God while all those nasty Gentiles got their just desserts. They even perceived some legal privileges were attached to

their hearing the law being read to them, as if just hearing were the point. It's as if some of you on judgment day try to remind God that you listened to 637 Dan Hendley sermons. I know it may seem like doing that should win you some points, and I am in complete agreement with you – but apparently the Lord is not. He expects you to actually do as He commands.

Now, we ended last time by seeking to explain how this proposition is consistent with a gospel of grace for sinners. And, this passage takes us back to that concern. The doers of the law are justified, writes Paul. The same Paul who will say in chapter three that justification is of faith apart from the works of the law. We could dismiss Paul as being inconsistent and wrong. That is an option. We could also suggest that what we read here is the high requirement of the law that no one but Christ meets. John Stott takes that angle. But I agree with the vast majority of commentators on this passage in arguing that what Paul says in verse 13 is not inconsistent with his gospel and is a fair description of the redeemed. The verse does not address how they are justified – on what basis – it simply says that the justified will be doers of the law. Whether their doing or something else is the basis of their justification will be addressed a little later. But this verse describes the redeemed, not how they got that way. And the description is not meant to suggest perfection. They are law-keepers in a relative way. When you read I John you encounter this problem. There it says that we prove ourselves to be lovers of Jesus by our obedience, but it also says we must confess our sins. How do those fit together? Only if the apostle means that believers are generally, but not perfectly obedient. As John MacArthur puts it – obedience must be the direction of our lives, if not the perfection. Another good John, Brother Piper, writes that *the ones who will be acquitted at the last judgment will be those who 1) love God's law, and 2) depend on his help to live according to the truth that they have, and 3) trust God for his mercy when they stumble*. This is so because when the Spirit gives us new life he does not just pardon, he changes us. In defense of this approach I remind you of how Jesus told his disciples that if their righteousness did not exceed that of the scribes and pharisees (those who had a phony righteousness), they would not enter the kingdom of heaven. Some day in the near future we will get to Romans 8. Look at what it says there in Romans 8:2-4 *The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.* ³*For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh,* ⁴*so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not*

walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. Well, there you go. This amazing gospel that Paul preaches promises not only a substitute to pay for your sins, but an internal power that turns lawbreakers into lawkeepers.

That should strike us as a wonderful thing. We aren't left in a pit of sin where we serve sin and Satan, but the Lord lifts us out of that into a new lifestyle that honors him. But many of us struggle with this teaching because of what it may say about loved ones of ours who we hope might be saved, but do not demonstrate a heart to follow Christ in the way of obedience to his word. That's hard isn't it? But that clearly is an implication of New Testament teaching. A heart indifferent to obeying Christ is a heart indifferent to his sacrifice as well.

Alright, we move on to see secondly that although judgment is concerned with our doing, not our knowing – it does take our knowledge into consideration. Scripture says this in many places—judgment is always according to knowledge – at least the knowledge accessible to us. 12 *For all who have sinned without the Law will also perish without the Law, and all who have sinned under the Law will be judged by the Law.* In other words, those Gentile people who never heard the words of Scripture, sinned without the law. As we will see they had other forms of revelation but not the Scripture and that will be taken into account at judgment. But the Jewish folks who grew up around the Scripture, who were blessed in that additional way, will be judged more strictly because of the greater light from which they turned away to follow their lusts. You know the Biblical principle – of those who are given much, much will be expected. That applies to young people growing up at North Park Church and it applied to those first century Jews who had the privilege of hearing the word of God, and, in some cases, actually encountering the Messiah. So, judgment is related to one's knowledge or exposure to the truth of God.

But, our third point from this passage is that everyone knows enough. Everyone knows enough to legitimate God's judgment. Paul made this point as well in chapter one. Here he expounds on what this means for the two groups. The Jewish folks are responsible because they had the written revelation of God. The Gentiles did not have that – but they did have the revelation of God in creation and in their own conscience. This is the point of verses 14-15 *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, ¹⁵in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them.* I think we all understand this. There is this common grace gift of

the Lord we often call the *conscience*. It is likely part of the image of God which we share. Christians need to be honest and clear. Unbelievers, whom we believe are quite lost, still do very nice things. I remember, around the time of my sister's death, being impressed by the kindness of folks whom, I know, do not share my love for the Savior. But, through the common grace provisions of God, through cultural norms and through decent parenting, their depravity is mitigated. I thought of Abimelech in Scripture. Genesis 20 Abraham and Sarah moved to Gerar and Abraham was afraid because Sarah was attractive and Abraham knew he might get taken out so someone else could have her. So, he says she is his sister. The pagan king of the place, Abimelech, does take her as a member of his harem until he learns in a dream that she was married. So, he gives her back to Abraham and reproves him for lying and setting them up to commit adultery. In this case, the pagan polygamist is the moral hero as opposed to Abraham the father of the faith. Or maybe, Abraham, the father of the inconsistent?

Anyway, we see this common grace at work in those who are not born-again. Thank God it is there. As it is removed, which I think is happening in our society, the world goes to pot and becomes a much more dangerous place. Now, Paul's thinking takes this turn in verse 14. He says that sometimes the Gentiles show by their conduct and speech that they know right and wrong. They know. Their obedience is partial and flawed but it shows they know. Oddly enough, this reminded me of when we were home-schooling our young children and teaching them math. I was frequently consternated about their mathematical inabilities. And the question I would ask myself is, *does this child not get it or is he unwilling to do the hard thinking?* Ever been there as a parent or teacher? Sure – but sometimes the child would slip up and show me they really could do the work so that afterward I kind of knew I was dealing with laziness. Same thing here – unbelievers who want to argue that there is no objective moral law, will let the cat out of the bag when they make arguments that appeal to an objective moral law. *No one can say what is right or wrong for you --- but slavery is bad! That's evil!* Ah – you do believe in a fixed standard. Yes, they do. Everyone really does regardless of the arguments they make. And most of us agree about the standards – truth good, lies bad – saving lives good, taking lives bad – giving good, stealing bad. These are universal moral norms that everyone believes deep down. This one reason I feel we who know and love the truth have an advantage in cultural debates. I know many are fooling themselves or attempting to. They really don't believe killing babies is okay. They know deep down that is terrible and homosex is unnatural, and stealing is wicked and war is tragic. Sometimes their selfish interests pull them toward

contrary arguments, but they are going against conscience at those points. They know better. They truly do. This is Paul's point in Romans 1 and 2. Only the redeemed will love God's law, but everyone has some knowledge of it and are accountable.

Okay, that is our first short sermon. Take a breath and let's dive into our second one which is based on verse 16 *on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus*. The syntax of this sentence is a little awkward but it is packed with important stuff. Let's break it down into four short points.

First, there is a day. We spoke of this last time. The day of judgment, called in Scripture the day or that day. It is like the biggest day yet to come when the living and the dead are brought before the throne of God to answer to Him for how they responded to his revelation of himself.

Secondly, there is a judge. The verse says God will judge the world, but then adds that phrase, "through Christ Jesus." Jesus says, and the apostles join with him, to announce that judgment has been given to him. In his role as mediator, as the perfect God-man, he will judge us all. Now, that is not just interesting Trinitarian trivia, that is spectacular and wonderful. Think of it. Jesus is called our advocate, our defense attorney. He loves us enough to lay down his life for us and now, we are we promised as we head into judgment? Jesus is also the Judge. We fall into his hands. Give me that! What a relief to see on the throne one who is your friend. Back in February when my sister suddenly passed away in my home town of Ocala, Florida. I went back there to try to settle her affairs and sell her house. These are things I didn't know how to do. Dealing with an estate, with probate, with a real-estate deal – but I remembered I had an old friend from high-school who had been an attorney there – and he did all of that. He even owned the title company and put in a rush order on my behalf. Then the real-estate side of things – one of my best friends has sold more real-estate in that area than probably anyone ever. These two guys joined together to walk me through it all step by step. What a relief it was to find two friends in positions of influence at a vulnerable time of need. But nothing in comparison to this – Jesus, the lover of my soul, will be there to plead my case and then decide my case. Things look good for the lovers of Jesus.

One other quick note before we move on – verse 11 reminds us that our judge is impartial. We spoke of this last time. The main idea is that he doesn't care about your race, your ethnicity, what groups you are a part of. None of that will

sway him. The Greek word translated “impartial” really means that he does not “receive face.” It is sort of a Greek idiom about true justice, and it made me think of the idea of a blind audition. Anyone here ever participated in one of those? It is my understanding that the tradition of auditions for places in a symphony orchestra has been that the musician plays behind a curtain so that those evaluating the music cannot see the sex or race or size or anything else about the candidate – they just hear the music. In recent years, some orchestras are moving away from the blind audition in order to give value to diversity and not just the music. But Jesus, as judge, will not receive face, that is he will not be impacted by anything other than one’s character, faith and deeds. We have the promise of a perfect and wonderful Judge.

Next, we notice that judgment day will consider more than just the externalities of our conduct. Our thoughts, our motives will be under review as well. *God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus.* That would include secret deeds that no one but you and God have known about. But it will also include secret thoughts --- your animosities and nurtured hatreds, your lusts and your arrogance. We know the Judge knows about all these things. *I Corinthians 4:5 Don’t make judgments about anyone ahead of time—before the Lord returns. For He will bring our darkest secrets to light and will reveal our private motives. Then God will give to each one whatever praise is due.* Hmm. That first part makes me wonder if there will be any praise due at all. Wow – that can be intimidating to think on – and it should instruct our behavior, but listen – my secret sins and my rotten motives will result in praise for someone. Maybe not me, but for Jesus. People will see all my flaws and say what? *Wow, what a scumbag?* No – they will say, *Wow, what a Savior to set his love on one such as he.* They will sing, *his sins they are many but Christ’s mercies are more.* And that will be good. But then the other side of it --- my secret godly deeds will be shown too. My holy and loving thoughts – and those too will result in praise for the Savior. Wow, what a powerful Savior to change that guy! You follow? It will all result in glory – mostly for Jesus, but some will spill over to us as well. Bring it on. Come Lord Jesus.

Then finally, we get to look at judgment in the gospel. Paul makes this peculiar remark about God judging *according to my gospel*. This is the only time he calls it *my gospel*. Sounds a bit presumptuous. Normally it is the gospel of God or Christ, or grace. But here it is *mine*. I think he means to suggest that there are others preaching a different and false gospel and this is his shorthand for distinguishing the true gospel from those. But I like that Paul wants to be identified with his message. He is not ashamed. Someone asks, *is this your kid? Is this your*

car? Is this your gun? And you may not want to own up. But Paul does not hesitate. God's gospel and my gospel. But *gospel* means *good news*. We think of it as delivering us from judgment – how is it that judgment is according to it?

Well, first the gospel promises judgment. It even includes the news that Jesus is the judge. We see this throughout the preaching in Acts. In Acts 10 Peter is preaching and says 42 *And He ordered us to preach to the people, and solemnly to testify that this is the One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead.* We don't just preach Jesus Savior on a cross, we preach Jesus Judge on a throne. Judgment is part of the message. In Acts 17, Paul presents the gospel to a pagan crowd in Athens and concludes with this reason to repent - 31 *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.* Of course, properly understood, the gospel message is a message about judgment isn't it? John Stott writes: *The good news of salvation shines forth brightly when it is seen against the dark background of divine judgment. We cheapen the gospel if we represent it as a deliverance from unhappiness, fear, guilt and other felt needs instead of a rescue from coming wrath.* Now, the gospel does many things for a rescued soul – but what is there more important than this? It is the weightiest subject imaginable. Far greater than our health or family or government. The gospel prepares one for the day of judgment and provides all that is needed to face that day with confidence and even eager anticipation because, again, our Savior is on the throne – both our advocate and our judge. Oh, how we need to sink these truths deeply in our hearts. When we do it will show forth in joy, in peace, in praise, in obedient living and in faithful witness for the King.