

27. The Book of Romans 2:15-16

Paul's Epistle to the Romans

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(8-30-23)

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This evening we find ourselves in the first main section of the Book of Romans.

This first section falls under the heading of “**Condemnation**” because in it Paul wants to prove that the whole human race, apart from Christ, is condemned by God—which means at one point He *will* judge the world.

Paul in the first 16 verses of Romans 2 gives 6 principles that become the basis by which God will judge all people: 1. *Knowledge*; 2. *Truth*; 3. *Guilt*; 4. *Deeds*; 5. *Impartiality*; 6. *Motives*

We've already looked at the first 4 principles of God's coming judgment—which brought us to number 5 which we started looking at last time—

5. **Impartiality**—v.11

Romans 2:6, 11 (NKJV)

⁶ who “will render to each one according to his deeds”... ¹¹ **For there is no partiality with God.**

The idea behind the statement that “**there is no partiality with God**” is the fact that—

1. *He doesn't favor certain people over others.*
2. *He deals fairly with all people according to the 'light' (knowledge) each of them had.*

You see, Paul anticipated the question “*Are you saying then, that God judges everyone the same?*” And his answer is ‘*No*’ based on what he goes on to say starting in verse 12:

Romans 2:12 (NKJV)

¹² **For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law...**

In other words, there is no partiality with God—He is absolutely fair when He judges.

If a person had the law of God (His written law given to Israel thru Moses) they will be judged by God's written law—and if they didn't have the law of God, they will be judged apart from God's written law. Or in other words, God's final judgment upon unbelievers will be totally impartial based on the light each person possessed and what they did with it.

Those who had the Word of God will be judged by it and those who didn't will be judged apart from it.

- *“Yes, but how can God judge the Gentiles when He didn’t give them His divine laws (His Word) as He did the Jewish people?”*

Many people think that because God gave the Jews the Torah (The Law—Genesis thru Deuteronomy) that meant He favored them and put the Gentiles at an unfair disadvantage—but Paul is going to tell us that, in fact, the opposite is true.

Oh, sure, having God’s Word is better than not having it—but with knowledge comes greater responsibility because people will be judged more severely for knowing God’s truth but not living up to the light they possessed.

It’s as James said in Chapter 3 verse 1 of his epistle—*“My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.”*

Whether you’re talking about the Jewish people in Paul’s day or church goers living today—just because a person has access to God’s Word and goes to synagogue or church every week and hears it proclaimed and taught—if they only hear God’s Word but don’t live it out in their life they will incur the greater condemnation on the day of judgment than the person who didn’t have access to God’s written Word.

One of the issues the writers of the N.T. addressed was the mentality that said, *“If I go to synagogue or church and hear God’s Word—that’s all I need to do.”*

Romans 2:13 (NKJV)

¹³ (for not the hearers of the law *are* just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified;

James 1:22 (NKJV)

²² But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

But again, some would say at this point—

- *“If a person didn’t have the law of God—how can God possibly condemn them for not obeying it?”*

Paul anticipated that question and tells us that God will not judge a person for what they *didn’t* know—He will only judge them for what they *did* know but didn’t obey.

In other words, unbelievers will only be judged based on whatever ‘light’ (truth) they had.

Romans 2:14–15 (NKJV)

¹⁴ for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, ¹⁵ who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves *their* thoughts accusing or else excusing *them*)

There are 3 great reasons why the heathen is without excuse for being lost and condemned: *Creation; Conduct; and Conscience.*

1. Creation—1:18-20

As we’ve already seen in chapter 1, God has clearly revealed Himself thru the creation so that they are without excuse—so the *creation* condemns them.

2. Conduct—2:14

“...for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law [the written law of God], are a law to themselves...” (v.14)

In other words, each person’s heart becomes the ‘*tablets*’ upon which God has written His laws— even as were the stone tablets God gave to Moses on Mt. Sinai.

And Paul tells us that their conduct, based on the knowledge of the Law written in their hearts—will be the basis for God’s judgment upon them.

One well-known pastor had this to say on the subject—

“Throughout history there have been many unbelievers who have been honest in business, respectful of their parents, faithful to their wives or husbands, caring of their children, and generous to those in need—all of which are good things God’s Word commends. God’s standard of justice is reflected in many secular judicial systems, wherein stealing, murder, and various other forms of immorality are considered wrong and made illegal. Many pagan philosophies, both ancient and modern, teach certain standards of ethics that closely parallel those in Scripture.

The fact that such people did good things, knowing they were ethically good, proves they had knowledge of God’s Law written in their hearts. Therefore, if those people never come to trust in the true God, their good deeds will actually witness against them on the day of judgment.”

3. Conscience—2:15a

Romans 2:14–15 (NKJV)

¹⁴ for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, ¹⁵ **who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves *their thoughts accusing or else excusing them*).**

The Bible says that God has written His laws in our hearts and has given us a ‘*warning system*’ which sounds the alarm when we break one of His laws.

That warning system is our *conscience*, and the alarm is called guilt. Whenever a person (believer or unbeliever) violates one of God’s laws they feel *guilty* which is God’s way of warning them they have broken one of His commandments and need to repent and get right with Him before He imposes judgment of some kind upon them.

So, *guilt* is the alarm that begins to sound in a person’s heart telling them they have done something wrong—something God has forbidden. et, it’s hard for people to live with guilt (it makes them feel bad)—so most of them try to get rid of the guilt.

There are only 3 ways to get rid of guilt:

- 1) ***Get rid of God***—in other words become an atheist because by getting rid of God you get rid of the guilt of violating His laws.
- 2) ***Get right with God***—become a Christian by receiving Jesus as your Savior whose blood washes away the guilt of sin.
- 3) ***Turn your conscience off.***

Again, if a person breaks God's laws—the alarm of guilt begins to sound.

That guilt is designed to **'accuse them' (v.15)**—in other words, bear witness to their heart that they are guilty of breaking one of God's commandments and thus hopefully lead them to repentance.

But more times than not, since guilt is very unpleasant and most people refuse to repent—they will inevitably try to alleviate the guilt by *excusing* their sin in some way (justifying it) or by *blaming* someone else for the wrong they have done (Romans 2:15b).

After a while this becomes *reflexive* whenever they violate God's commandments—they seek to turn the guilt off by either *excusing* themselves or *accusing others*—until they *'short-circuit'* their conscience and render it inoperative.

When a person effectively *'turns off'* their conscience, they are then *'flying-blind'* morally speaking and will eventually crash—it will only be a matter of time.

John MacArthur in the Vanishing Conscience gave this illustration and insight—

"In 1984 an Avianca Airlines jet crashed in Spain. Investigators studying the accident made an eerie discovery. The "black box" cockpit recorders revealed that several minutes before impact a shrill, computer-synthesized voice from the plane's automatic warning system told the crew repeatedly in English, "Pull up! Pull up!"

The pilot, evidently thinking the system was malfunctioning, snapped, "Shut up, Gringo!" and switched the system off. Minutes later the plane plowed into the side of a mountain. Everyone on board died.

When I saw that tragic story on the news shortly after it happened, it struck me as a perfect parable of the way modern people treat the warning messages of their consciences...the wisdom of our age says guilt feelings are nearly always erroneous or hurtful; therefore, we should switch them off. But is that good advice...?"

No, that's terrible advice—advice that has led many lives to crash and burn. Again, the way you switch off your conscience is to ignore it by justifying why what you're doing is not wrong (you excuse it)—or you blame someone else for why you're doing what you're doing.

Eventually this leads to, as Paul put it in 1Timothy 4:2, our conscience being 'seared as with a hot iron'. (Explain)

The result is unbridled sin in the absence of all moral restraint—especially in the last days:

1 Timothy 4:1-2 (NKJV)

¹ Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, ² speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron,

Ephesians 4:19 (NKJV)

¹⁹ who, being past feeling [*their conscience rendered inoperative*], have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.

The more people in a society turn their conscience off—the more that society will become wicked and rebellious toward God and all those that God has placed in authority over them (parents, teachers, police, etc.) The thing that exasperates this is when the *consequences* of violating the laws of God or the laws of a society are removed it promotes the mentality that criminals are not doing anything wrong when they break the law.

They reason that if they were doing something wrong there would be consequences but since mayors, governors and other leaders have stopped prosecuting them—it says that laws are unjust and they can break them with impunity.

This allows them to turn their conscience off resulting in lawlessness and anarchy (use no cash bail as an example).

The consequences for breaking God's laws in conjunction with the human conscience were designed by God to be the restraint on man's fallen nature to keep it in check so that it didn't run wild.

Remove the restraints and the result is unbridled sin, violence, and rebellion at every level of society—especially in the last days—

2 Timothy 3:1-4 (NLT)

¹ You should know this, Timothy, that in the last days there will be very difficult times. ² For people will love only themselves and their money. They will be boastful and proud, scoffing at God, disobedient to their parents, and ungrateful. They will consider nothing sacred. ³ They will be unloving and unforgiving; they will slander others and have no self-control. They will be cruel and hate what is good. ⁴ They will betray their friends, be reckless, be puffed up with pride, and love pleasure rather than God... [Folks, that is the evening news!]

If an unbeliever lives up to that much light (1. *Creation*; 2. *Conduct*; and 3. *Conscience*)—God will reveal to them the full light of the gospel of Jesus Christ—enough for them to be saved!

John 7:17 (NKJV)

¹⁷ If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or *whether* I speak on My own *authority*.

One pastor related this true story on the subject—

"A man of my acquaintance is an excellent illustration of God's honoring a genuine quest to find Him. This man grew up in one of the most primitive tribes in Africa. Because he was ill-behaved and incorrigible as a child, he was frequently made to stay outside when the family had guests. Although he was severely punished by the tribe as well as by his mother, he persisted in acts of pointless mischief and even cruelty. He reports that he felt guilty and heartsick even while doing the mischief but could not seem to help himself. He knew something was very wrong with his life and would often go into the forest and pound his head against a tree, crying, "What's wrong with me? Why do I do such things?" More than once he considered suicide.

One day one of his friends returned from a visit to the coast. Among the many fascinating stories, he told was that of some people who met together every Sunday to sing and talk. When the boy asked his friend why those people met together, he was told they were singing about and praying to the God who had created the whole world. They called their God Father and believed He heard and answered their prayers.

With that small bit of knowledge about the Lord, the boy over whom the tribe had despaired decided to pray to this God himself. "I had never heard anyone pray," he recounts, "but I decided I would just talk to this God like He was my father. I can't explain what happened, but it was an exciting experience. I wanted to know more about this God but there was no one in our village who knew anything about Him. So, for two years I kept praying by myself on Sundays, hoping that someday someone would come along who could tell me about Him."

While working on a government road project, he visited his cousin in the village where he had been born and discovered to his great surprise and delight that a group of people met there on Sundays to sing and pray to the God he had heard about. "How excited I was," he says. "I could hardly wait for Sunday. That morning I sat in the back. I listened to a man tell about God for the first time in my life. I found He was far more wonderful than I had ever imagined. The preacher said that God loved the world so much that He sent His only Son named Jesus to

take away my sins. I wondered if He knew how terrible I was. I wondered if He knew the awful things I had done back in my village. But the preacher said no matter what I had done, God would forgive me and make my heart clean. I knew it was all true."

Because that young man had been genuinely seeking God, when he finally heard the gospel, the Holy Spirit confirmed its truth to his yearning heart. He knew that God had heard his prayers and had sent him to a place where he could hear the message of salvation. "I gave my heart to God that morning," he testifies, "and it was nice to know He had a Son, too. He was really a Father, just like I had been praying to."

The first 5 principles that become the basis upon which God will judge all people: 1. *Knowledge*; 2. *Truth*; 3. *Guilt*; 4. *Deeds*; 5. *Impartiality*—which then brings us to number 6—Motives

6. Motives—v.16

Romans 2:12, 16 (NKJV)

¹² For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law...¹⁶ **in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel.**

Jesus said—

Luke 12:2–3 (NKJV)

² For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, nor hidden that will not be known. ³ Therefore whatever you have spoken in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have spoken in the ear in inner rooms will be proclaimed on the housetops.

Matthew 12:36 (NKJV)

³⁶ But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment..."

As we said when we looked at verse 6—on judgment day God *"will render to each one according to his (or her) deeds."* But here in verse 16 Paul takes it one step further and tells us that—not only will God judge the deeds of unbelievers (the outward actions of their lives)—He will also judge the *"secrets of men's hearts."*

Or in other words, the motives behind their actions.

1 Corinthians 4:5 (NKJV)

⁵ Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels [motives] of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God.

Hebrews 4:13 (NKJV)

¹³ And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things *are* naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we *must give* account.

Psalms 139:1–3, 23–24 (NKJV)

¹ O Lord, You have searched me and known *me*. ² You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off. ³ You comprehend my path and my lying down, And are acquainted with all my ways... ²³ Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties; ²⁴ And see if *there is any* wicked way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting.

1 Chronicles 28:9 (NKJV)

⁹ “As for you, my son Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve Him with a loyal heart and with a willing mind; for the Lord searches all hearts and understands all the intent of the thoughts. If you seek Him, He will be found by you; but if you forsake Him, He will cast you off forever.

1 Samuel 16:7 (NKJV)

⁷ But the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For *the Lord* does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”

Jeremiah 17:9–10 (NKJV)

⁹ “The heart *is* deceitful above all *things*, And desperately wicked; Who can know it? ¹⁰ I, the Lord, search the heart, / test the mind, Even to give every man according to his ways, According to the fruit of his doings.

2 Chronicles 6:30 (NKJV)

³⁰ then hear from heaven Your dwelling place, and forgive, and give to everyone according to all his ways, whose heart You know (for You alone know the hearts of the sons of men),

Proverbs 15:11 (NKJV)

¹¹ Hell and Destruction *are* before the Lord; So how much more the hearts of the sons of men.

Isaiah 66:18 (NKJV)

¹⁸ “For I *know* their works and their thoughts. It shall be that I will gather all nations and tongues; and they shall come and see My glory.

Ecclesiastes 12:14 (NKJV)

¹⁴ For God will bring every work into judgment, Including every secret thing, Whether good or evil.

In the judgment, not only will the outward actions of our lives be judged but also the inward attitudes of our hearts as well—i.e., the works as well as what motivated them in the first place.

Romans 14:10–12 (NKJV)

¹⁰ But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. ¹¹ For it is written: “*As I live, says the Lord, Every knee shall bow to Me, And every tongue shall confess to God.*” ¹² So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.

2 Corinthians 5:9–11 (NKJV)

⁹ Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. ¹⁰ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things *done* in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. ¹¹ Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are well known to God, and I also trust are well known in your consciences.

The judgment seat that Paul speaks of in Romans 14:10 and 2Corinthians 5:10 was the judicial bench of a city court in the Roman Empire—

Matthew 27:19 (NKJV)

¹⁹ While he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent to him, saying, “Have nothing to do with that just Man, for I have suffered many things today in a dream because of Him.”

John 19:13 (NKJV)

¹³ When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus out and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called *The Pavement*, but in Hebrew, Gabbatha.

Of course, this judgment will be different for believers in Christ as opposed to unbelievers—and will be separated by at least 1007 years (Tribulation Period plus the Millennial Kingdom).

The Judgment of Believers**Revelation 22:12 (NKJV)**

¹² “And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward *is* with Me, to give to everyone according to his work.

1 Corinthians 3:12–15 (NKJV)

¹² Now if anyone builds on this foundation *with* gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, ¹³ each one’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is. ¹⁴ If anyone’s work which he has built on *it* endures, he will receive a reward. ¹⁵ If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire. [Explain]

This begs the question—what motives will produce works that are like gold, silver, and precious stones in God’s eyes?

Romans 2:7 (NKJV)

⁷ eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; [God’s glory, honor, and keeping my eyes on the eternal]

1 Corinthians 13:1–3 (NKJV)

¹ Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. ² And though I have *the gift of* prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. ³ And though I bestow all my goods to feed *the poor*, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.

Any other motive other than the glory of God and the love for those made in His image are: ‘*wood, hay, and straw.*’

The Christian life is all about Jesus—it’s not about us.

So much done in the church in the way of service is motivated by self-interest, carnal motivation, the desire for recognition, self-promotion, pride, and the praise of men.

Galatians 1:10 (NKJV)

¹⁰ For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ.

2 Corinthians 5:14 (NIV)

¹⁴ For Christ’s love compels us...

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