

Inescapable Judgment, part 3

(Romans 2:1-16)

(preached 3/1/20; Pine Grove BC Sun AM)

Introduction

Take your Bibles and turn to the first 16 verses of Romans 2.

WE have been in these 16 verses the last two weeks.

WE will finish this section today, and the point of the section is that the Jews are in as much need of God's righteousness in Christ as the Gentiles.

Let's read these verses together.

1 Therefore you have no excuse, [a]everyone of you who passes judgment, for in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. 2 And we know that the judgment of God [b]rightly falls upon those who practice such things. 3 But do you suppose this, O man, [c]when you pass judgment on those who practice such things and do the same yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God? 4 Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance? 5 But [d]because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for

yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, 6 who will render to each person according to his deeds: 7 to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; 8 but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation. 9 There will be tribulation and distress [e]for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek, 10 but glory and honor and peace to everyone who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 11 For there is no partiality with God.

12 For all who have sinned [f]without the Law will also perish [g]without the Law, and all who have sinned [h]under the Law will be judged [i]by the Law; 13 for it is not the hearers [j]of the Law who are [k]just before God, but the doers [l]of the Law will be justified.

14 For when Gentiles who do not have [m]the Law do [n]instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having [o]the Law, are a law to themselves, 15 in 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, 16 on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus.

Harry Houdini is the world's most famous escape artist.

He was born in 1874 in Hungary, but gained fame in the United States and Europe for his fantastic escapes.

In 1904, Houdini escaped from spiral handcuffs in London in front of a crowd of 4000 people and 100 journalists.

The handcuffs took 5 years to make, and it took Houdini over 70 minutes to se himself free.

He would go on to call that escape the most difficult of his career.

However, the most dangerous escape of his career occurred in the United States in 1915.

In this stunt, Houdini was buried in an open grave under 6 feet of dirt without a casket.

After some tense moments, Houdini's hand emerged from the dirt but he fell unconscious once he was free of the grave.

He would go on to say that stunt nearly cost him his life.

From there, Houdini would eventually escape from a large milk can filled with water, a closed casket submerged in a pool, and a wooden boxed tossed in the East River in New York City.

All in all, Houdini 100s of impossible escapes over his career, and his acts have been copied and repeated in the years since his death in 1926.

Over time, evidence has shown that Houdini was not as escape artist but rather an ingenious illusionist and magician.

He was simply really good at keeping his secrets from being revealed.

Along these same lines, the Jewish people thought they had a secret escape from God's wrath.

In their minds, God would show mercy to them despite their sin.

And he would show mercy simply because they were His people and His nation.

Since the days of Abraham, the Jews thought they held a place of privilege in God's world.

And in a sense, they did.

They were the people that God revealed Himself to in special ways.

He led Israel out of Egypt as cloud of smoke and a pillar of fire.

He gave them His law in the 10 commandments and hundreds of other laws.

He gave them a land of their own.

He gave them food from heaven as they walked to that land.

He spoke to Israel through his prophets.

And best of all, he preserved Israel despite their continual sins against him.

Every time they dishonored Him with their, God showed mercy and kept his relationship with them in tact.

In fact by the time that Jesus comes into the world, the Jews see no need for a Savior from sin.

And part of that reason for their rejection of Christ is because they assumed that God would spare them from judgment as He had done 100s of times before.

But as we have come to learn over the past few weeks, God's judgment is inescapable.

You don't get leniency in God's sentencing.

In fact, the closer you are to God, the harsher the judgment when you reject God.

Though the Jews thought they would escape from God's final judgment, Romans 2:1-16 makes it clear that they will not only be judged, they will be judged at a higher standard because of the privilege they had.

And the reason for that is that God does not play favorites in terms of judgment.

As verse 11 says so clearly.

There is no partiality with God.

And as I have stressed for the past few weeks, that should put us in the Bible belt on full alert in terms of God's wrath.

In other words, people who have incredible access to the truth of God need to understand that access increases accountability.

The more you have received the mercy of God, the more likely they are to presume that God is pleased with them.

While the Jews experienced God's forgiveness more than any nation in the world, that was not meant to give them a false sense of security.

It was meant to cause them to believe and obey God.

Sadly, the Jews came to assume that they would escape and sadly many in the south make the same assumption, but Romans is clear.

God shows no partiality in judgment.

And verses 1-16 of Romans 2 explain the impartial nature of God's judgment.

And though this section of Romans 2 is aimed at the Jew, it applies to all who think they will escape the judgment of God.

First of all, God's judgment is escapable because it is a judgment of knowledge.

In other words, the Jew knew he was a sinner and he knew that he deserved judgment for his sin.

God had specifically revealed the basis for his judgment in the OT, and the Jews were accountable for what they knew.

But Jews would also be judged what they did.

That was the section that we examined last week in verses 6-11.

God's judgment is also inescapable because it is a judgment based on deeds.

The evidence for judgment are the works of your life.

And everyone's life will either be an exhibit of righteousness or wickedness.

And let me repeat, salvation is a matter of faith alone in Christ alone, but the evidence of that faith will be seen in deeds of a person's life.

In same way, the rejection of Christ alone will be seen in deeds of that person's life as well.

And though God already knows whether a person is saved or not, the outworking of that faith or unbelief will be seen in the deeds of a person's life.

Think it this way.

Let's say there's an art contest at school, and the teacher assigns the same drawing for every kid.

And at the end of the day, the teacher simply announces to the class that Johnny won but doesn't show the class his work.

The class would be upset thinking that the teacher was just playing favorites.

So what does the teacher do?

She begins to hang the artwork which serves as evidence for why Johnny won.

In the same way, people in the day of judgment may think that God is simply playing favorites with those who go to heaven.

They may accuse God of all sorts of injustice.

So what does God do?

He lays out the artwork of everyone's life as evidence of the decision he makes.

None of the deeds are the basis of salvation or rejection.

That was simply a matter of belief or unbelief.

But the deeds are evidence that justify God's judgment.

In the context of chapter 2, the Jews would be in big trouble since their deeds were just as evil as the Gentiles.

In fact, we could even say they were more evil because the Jews knew better, and why did they know better?

Because had revealed Himself and His ways to Israel more than any other nation in the world.

And as we said last week, that made the Jews more accountable to God.

Think about your parenting.

Are you going to punish your kids worse for a first or second offense to your rules?

Well, the second violation will get worse punishment.

In fact, you may not punish your children at all for a 1st offense, and why is that?

Well, sometimes they may not have even known they were doing something wrong.

We even have a phrase in parenting that covers first offenses.

WE will say, "He or she didn't know any better."

And what does that mean?

It means that they lacked knowledge of what was right or wrong so we let them off the hook the first time.

But punishment will get progressively worse with each offense afterward.

And that leads us to our final section on God's judgment.

God judges according to what we know, what we do, and what we have.

We will call this..

III. Judgment according to Law (12-16)

Look back at verse 12..

12 For all who have sinned [f]without the Law will also perish [g]without the Law, and all who have sinned [h]under the Law will be judged [i]by the Law;

In verse 12, we see two categories of people.

People without the Law and people with the Law, and that is a simple way to identify Gentiles and Jews.

The Jews were the people that God gave his law to.

They were the people that God chose to reveal his ways to.

And we will talk more about that in a moment, but let's look at the people in the world without the Law.

Throughout history, most of the world has operated without the Law of God.

For every Israelite in the OT, there was a Jebusite, a Moabite, a Amorite, a Philistine.

And all those nations were nations without the Law of God.

Still today, most people in the world have no idea of God's law.

Yes, they may know about the Bible.

They may know about Christianity.

They may know about God's relationship to Israel.

But ultimately, they live without the Law of God.

And this always raises a great question that we talked about in chapter 1, and that is the question of what happens to people who never hear the gospel.

In other words, will God judge people who never hear the truth of the Bible?

The answer in chapter 1 was yes because creation revealed their is a God.

And the answer in chapter 2 is also yes.

Verse 12 says that those without the Law will also perish without the Law.

The Greek word for perish is apollumi, and nearly every translation uses the word perish here.

It is more than just a physical death that is talked about here, it is spiritual death as well.

In fact, used this same word in Matthew 10:28..

28 Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in [x]hell.

The word for destroy is apollumi.

And the implication of verse 12 in Romans 2 is that those without the Law will still go to eternal destruction despite the fact that they never had the Law of God.

Now, the question that arises is how can they be held responsible for what they didn't know?

Well, we will get to that in verse 14, but now let's consider group #2.

What happens to people who have Law?

End of verse 12.

and all who have sinned [h]under the Law will be judged [i]by the Law;

The short answer is that those who knew the Law and will be judged by the Law.

In this context, Jews will be judged according to Law that God gave them.

This is what should put great fear into anyone who has access to the Bible.

God will judge you according to the level of truth that you had.

That is a scary thought for the Jew, for the church attender, for anyone who was exposed at any level to God's truth.

Every verse that you have heard preached or taught or explained is piling up a level of incredible accountability in your life.

The Jews had been exposed to centuries of God's truth and Law, and now Paul is reminding them that such exposure does not exclude them from judgment but put them in the bullseye of judgment.

And why is this the case?

Because there is no partiality with God.

Only He knows what a persons knows, and therefore only He is able to judge according to the Law that a person has.

You see, God is perfectly fair in all he does.

Therefore, his judgment is perfectly fair toward every person.

Listen to one commentator here..

"A man will be judged by what he had the opportunity to know. If he knew the Law, he will be judged as one who

knew the Law. If he did not know the Law, he will be judged as one who did not know the Law. God is fair. A man will be judged by his fidelity to the highest (Law) that it was possible for him to know.”

Look at verse 13..

13 for it is not the hearers [j]of the Law who are [k]just before God, but the doers [l]of the Law will be justified.

Here, Paul continues to speak to the Jew, and this is further warning to them.

You see, the Jews thought their hearing of God’s law was enough.

Each week they went to synagogue which was essentially a time to read the law to the people and explain it with comments.

However, the Jews thought that just hearing the word of God was enough.

They figured that the Lord was honored by their attendance, regardless of what their minds did while they listened.

They figured that God was just happy that they made it synagogue to listen.

But Paul tells the Jew that hearing is not enough.

God desires doers of the law.

God desires people to listen and then obey.

WE have the same expectations of others.

You expect people to listen and then do what you say.

And where does that expectation come from?

It comes from you being made in God's image.

Yet, the Jews were only interested in hearing instead of doing.

And let me warn you today that God has not changed.

If you hear the word of God today, you better listen and obey.

There are churches full of people today who hear the word but don't do what they hear.

Don't let that be true of you.

When I was in seminary, you could audit, which simply meant that you could go and listen to the lectures but you weren't responsible to do the work.

Sadly, many people audit the word of God.

They listen but they fail to produce the good works that come from listening and doing.

So the Jews are in trouble because they had the law, they heard the law, but they failed to do the law.

But let's get back to the Gentile in verse 14..

14 For when Gentiles who do not have [m]the Law do [n]instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having [o]the Law, are a law to themselves, 15 in 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,

So why do people who never had the Law of God perish without it?

Why does God send someone to hell who never was exposed to the Bible or the Law?

Well, we know that they are accountable because of creation.

But they are also accountable to their own law.

And what is their own law?

Well, you see it right here in these verses.

It is the God-given conscience.

I will never forget 6th grade spelling bee.

I was in Mrs. Griffith's class and it was down to me and another girl.

I was given the word conscience.

And all I knew of the word was the first three letters.

C-O-N.....and then I froze.

So one girl sitting across from me held up her science book.

And I ended saying, C O N S C I E N C E.

I got to the next round of the spelling bee but that deceitfulness harmed my conscience forever.

Talk about irony.

You violate your conscience by spelling the word conscience.

So what is our conscience?

Here is how the dictionary defines it.

an inner feeling or voice viewed as acting as a guide to the rightness or wrongness of one's behavior

The Bible would say that inner voice is simply a God given warning systems to what is good and evil.

It could be called a law to ourselves as we see in the first part of verse 14

It could be called a God given instinct.

All these terms are essentially interchangeable.

Instinct, conscience, law to themselves..

And the point of what Paul is saying is that Gentiles are accountable to their God-given conscience.

Ultimately, God has written elements of his law on every human heart.

For the Jews, it was on their heart and in their hands in the OT.

And they were accountable to both.

For Gentiles, it was simply written on their heart, but they are accountable to it.

The story is told of a king who ordered his magician to make him something that would encourage right decisions.

So the magician created a ring that would tighten on his finger when he made a bad choice but would loosen if he corrected his choice.

That is an illustration of the conscience.

It tightens around around our heart when we do something wrong and loosens when when do something right.

And that conscience is in every man or woman who has ever been born.

Do you remember the original sin of Adam and Eve?

What did they do when they disobeyed and ate of the fruit?

They went and hid in the garden.

Why did they do that?

Their conscience tightened around them and brought shame for their sin.

And that has been true for everyone who disobeys God whether they had the full revelation of His law or not.

Marilyn Laszlo was a missionary to the Huana people of New Guinea.

They did not have a Bible in their own language so they were completely unfamiliar with the law of God.

And as she tried to translate the Bible into their language, she need a word for sin.

So she asked these natives, what is sin in your culture?

And they said it is when you lie or when you steal or when you take another's man life or wife.

When she heard that, she asked the natives, has anyone ever been here with a Bible before?

And they assured her that no one had.

So she asked, how do you know those things are wrong and each of the natives simply patted their chest signifying that something inside told them those actions were wrong.

And this has been the testimony of countless other missionaries.

Furthermore, the laws that govern the nations all include penalties for murder, for theft, for lying.

And why is that?

Was there a big conference to discuss what laws were govern the nations?

And the answer is no.

The reason that law codes are very similar is due to the fact that the same law is written on every human heart.

And for that reason, Gentiles without the written law are accountable to the law written on their heart.

No one in hell will be able to say that he or she didn't deserve to go.

The law that they had through their conscience is enough to condemn them forever.

In fact, Paul says that the conscience is a witness.

And what do witnesses do?

They testify.

They reveal truth.

And that testimony either accuses or defends us.

A conscience can be your greatest enemy or your best friend.

It is your greatest enemy when it exposes your sin and deserved judgment.

And it is your best friend when it defends your actions and soothes your mind.

But you have to be careful with the conscience.

First of all, it is purest early in life, and it corrupted quickly in life.

Second, If you have ignored your conscience.

If you aren't using Scripture to inform your conscience, be very careful.

The conscience is there to warn and to teach right and wrong, but ultimately our lives must be directed by Scripture.

The conscience is not the standard of life.

Scripture is.

So when Scripture and the conscience conflict, Scripture wins.

The conscience is there to push us to Christ.

The conscience is there to push us to Scripture.

The conscience is there so that rejectors of truth have no excuse before God.

The conscience is there so that those without the Written law are accountable to the law of the conscience and will be judged fairly.

And that leads to this final thought in verse 16..

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

Paul is not claiming credit for the gospel.

He is simply saying that the good news of Christ belongs to him and has saved him.

Paul simply identifies with the true gospel instead of the false teaching that was beginning to spread in the churches.

And the gospel is good news for all who are ready for judgment through faith in Christ.

But it is the worst news for those who have rejected Christ.

And sometimes the difference between the saved and unsaved is difficult to determine.

Yet on the day of judgment, everyone's heart will be opened and the difference between heaven and hell will be very apparent.

In that day, you won't be able to cover unbelief in morality and church attendance.

You won't be able to cover rejection of Christ with your good family name or your good person lifestyle.

In that day, all secrets will be shouted out loud, and belief and unbelief will be as clear as night and day.

Conclusion

My freshman year at Clemson was spent in the college of Architecture as I hoped to be a landscape architect.

One of our freshman projects was to build a structure out of 3 wooden sticks that was strong enough to hold one brick 6 inches off the ground.

I remember walking into class that day and looking at all the designs.

Some were gorgeous and creative.

Some were boring and simple.

But the real test was watching our professor lay the brick on top of the structure and letting go.

Some of the best looking designs were crushed under the weight of the brick, while other very plain stood and didn't even buckle under the brick.

In judgment, some of the finest looking people you have ever seen will be crushed under the weight of Gods' judgment while other will withstand his judgment and prove that their faith in Christ alone is genuine.

Let me tell you something.

Verse 1-16 may have been directed at the Jew who thought he would escape God's judgment, but they certainly apply to anyone familiar with God.

God is impartial in judgment.

He judges according to knowledge, deeds, and law.

He judges fairly according to what a person knows, what a person does, and whatever law a person possesses.

And let me tell you this.

No one has ever lived up to their own standards of right and wrong much less the standards that God has given.

For that reason, you better find shelter because wrath is deserved and it is coming.

And the only shelter in the storm will be Christ.

Come to Him.

Turn from your sin in repentance.

And put your trust in Him alone.

He has endured God's wrath for all who put their faith in Him.

Do not harden your conscience.

Do not create a less severe God in your mind.

This is the God of the Bible, and this is His gospel.

Believe the good news and come to Christ.

Let us pray.