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Romans 2:6-16

"According to Our Deeds"

December 22, 2021

All right. Let's open our Bibles tonight to Romans 2:6.

Paul was in Corinth in the spring of 58 A.D. on his last missionary journey, with a lot of guys, bringing money from Gentile churches intended to go to the church at Jerusalem that was poor; but, more importantly, that was Jewish, and they were believers. And they had a difficult time with the grace that had come to the Gentile churches, and so Paul wanted to bridge the gap through that love offering, if you will. He stopped in Greece with these folks; he would be there for three months. He wanted to be sure that he could make the feast day. But while he was there, there was a sister in the Lord there who was going to Rome, wanted a letter of recommendation. Paul had never been to Rome, but he knew some folks there - Aquila and Priscilla, to be exact, as well as a few others. So he sent a recommendation letter for her which turns out to be the last chapter of this book. What he didn't intend to write, I don't know. But he.....I don't know if he set out to write this letter or not, but the Lord had great intentions.

And out of Paul's heart came this theological masterpiece that focuses on a couple of things that are very important: the sinfulness of man and the graciousness of God. Probably no better manuscript in the Scriptures to carefully and meticulously address that topic. And so every word is important. And theology, like I said, takes work, but it is worth the effort. So Paul will talk to us about sin, go from sin to grace, ultimately go from grace to sanctification or living the kind of life that God would approve of.

So we started, and we told you that those are the three topics in this book: sin, salvation and sanctification. And though they are mixed up a little bit, they are easily divided, I thin. The subject of sin is really the subject of the first eight chapters. It is designed by Paul to do one thing. And try to put yourself in Paul's shoes. You know, there was a huge religious community, Jewish community. There was a tremendous amount of new believers coming to the Lord. There was also a bunch of new churches, and then there was this horrible Greek and Roman culture of idolatry in which literally the world was sinking. Every large city was dominated by these horrible idol practices and idol worship. And so Paul's desire was he wanted to communicate to all of them that man was a sinner God needed to save

and could save, but God would do it in a righteous way. In other words, God didn't change the rules when He said, "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23), but He would provide a way that was right with Him - doesn't violate His character - to save man lost in sin without just sweeping his sin under the rug and saying, "Okay, we'll look the other way." God would do it in a righteous manner. And so Paul does not leave a stone unturned. He goes from one principle to the next to teach us what we should know about our standing before the Lord.

The first chapter, Paul spends more time than he would normally talking about himself, about his motives, about what drove him in ministry. It was because he had never been to this church; they didn't have a personal relationship with Paul. But he had been preaching for years. And, like I said, this was his third missionary journey, and it was towards the end of it. So, years of being on the road, hundreds, if not more, churches planted. Certainly thousands of people who had come to know the Lord.

But beginning in verse 18 of chapter 1, Paul then begins to talk about God's anger against man's sinfulness and how right it is that God would be angry. In other words, man is separated from God. He starts by making two arguments. He said this, "God has not left Himself without a witness." In fact, He has given to man two things by which God can be known or at least sought after. Number one - creation. It all screams Creator. Didn't just happen. It would be foolish for anybody to conclude this just kind of happened. Second of all, God gave everyone a conscience, an internal witness of who He is; that whether you have the rules or not, someone teaches you or not, there is this instinctual response within that God has put there by creation to know right from wrong. Now that can be messed up over time with sin, but both of those are there to say to you, "Look up. Look up. Cry out. There's a Creator. There's a right and a wrong. And I want to know who this God is."

The problem with sin is the revelation of God in creation and the witness of God to the heart are willfully, because of sin, suppressed in man's heart. Sin will cause you to say, "No, I don't want to recognize those things as true." And Paul uses the words willfully suppressed those truths or willfully pushed them aside, and instead of turning to God or the One that is out there who has created us, you turn to self-confidence; you turn inward; you turn to self-made man's religiousness, if you will. You turn to worshipping idols that you've created. Paul describes sin and its consequences as driving man from one day to the other to utter foolishness, to

darkness. Eventually you're worshipping the creature rather than the Creator. Your mind becomes dark, he would say. You begin to find justification and rationale for your wickedness. And if you continue down that path, a perverted lifestyle will come forward, and you will meet the judgment of God. That's sin in its depth, if you will. And that's all found in chapter 1, beginning in verse 18 down through the end of the chapter. It is that deception that even when he agrees that sin should be judged, he'll happily continue in it and approve others who do the same thing. But that's kind of the big picture: here's what sin and its ugliness can do to a man's life if left by itself and God doesn't intervene.

In chapter 2 - at least in the first five verses that we looked at last week - Paul then turns to the reader who would make the argument, "Well, that's not me. All of that gross stuff in chapter 1 is not me. I am far more respectable than that, and I don't have the effects like that of a debased mind." And so God speaks through Paul to the respectable sinner, the fellow who thinks, "Well, I've still got it together." But remember Paul's whole object is to convince everyone who's reading they're sinners in need of a Savior. Always the same thing. And no matter where you place yourself on the ladder, you're going to fall short of God's glory and need His solution. And that's really the purpose for his writing.

So, in chapter 2, Paul turns to the respectable sinner, and he says to him, in verse 2, "God's judgment of you will be according to the truth." And it's the first of seven principles that govern God's judgment of man found in this chapter. We'll look through six of them tonight, and then we'll save the seventh one for the last study of Wednesdays for this year. But he talks to us, in verse 2, about the fact that there's really no way to hide from God's judgment because in the fact that we are able to judge others and say, "Well, that's wrong," we admit to God that we know the difference. And so even in our judgment of others we find no place to hide because we're saying we understand what's right and what's wrong. No amount of self-congratulation or self-approval will shield us, verse 3, from His wrath. God sees the facts, He knows the motives behind them. Principle one is God will judge us - every one of us - in truth.

We are also told that the goodness and the tolerance and the longsuffering of God should never be interpreted by man to denote His approval. "Well, if God is so righteous, why would He allow that to continue? Why wouldn't He put an end to that?" And the answer is always the same: God waits to give you time to repent. It is God's willingness to wait. In fact, if you read chapter 3:25, you will read

these words, ".....to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate that there's a time for His righteous judgment." In other words, God just waits for us to come around. If you find yourself living in sin, and God hasn't done anything about it, don't think He thinks that's a good idea. But God's waiting. He's waiting for you to come and turn to Him. And if you don't and over time, if you refuse, you're going to meet God's judgment. In fact we read here, in verse 5, that the judgment from God will be based on accumulated guilt or, if you will, accumulated culpability, "treasuring up for yourself." And the second principle of God's judgment of man is that He will not allow those things to just continue; that if you don't meet Jesus and find a clean slate because of the blood that He shed, you're going to pay for every sin. You're going to face the judgment for the hardness of every heart, of the impenitence, the unwillingness to repent. That judgment is as sure as a calendar date is, but it's based on God's righteousness and judgment. So, in chapter 2, it's the righteous sinner, it's the respectable sinner. I guess if you want to call chapter 1 the raunchy sinner, this is the respectable sinner.

And then we have one more category. We've got the religious sinner to come before Paul finally says, "But God has a solution for all of us." He just wants to be sure that we understand that all of us are stuck in the same place. And so this evening, let's start at verse 6, and we'll read there these words, " 'who will render to each one according to his deeds': eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness - indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, to the Jew first and also of the Greek; but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For there is no partiality with God. 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 (for not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified; 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, 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) in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel."

God's judgment of man, and tonight, verse 6, is the controlling words "according to your deeds." I'm sure we've all met someone, or maybe you've been involved with

doing something wrong and you get caught doing it, and so you run very quickly to cover up your excuse or to find an excuse. "I didn't do it, I wouldn't have done it except so-and-so pushed me over the edge, you don't understand my circumstances" and all. And so, when you get caught, sometimes that's the method that you use to try to deal with the guilt that it has brought. It could be that sometimes you're innocent, that your motives are right, and people misunderstand them; the circumstances are such that if the truth be known they would exonerate you. But just as often, excuses are just that, and they are particularly found when we try to justify our sin in relationship to God. Remember back in chapter 1, God accuses man - because of his sin - of suppressing the truth that He has revealed about Himself. And so whether it's in creation or in our hearts, and though we feel we are clear to judge others, we claim excuses when it comes to ourselves. We didn't know, we hadn't heard, we didn't understand, we weren't sure. But verse 2 says, of chapter 2, that God will judge "according to the truth." And here, in verse 6, He will also judge - the third principle - us "according to our deeds;" that we really can't even plead, when it comes to sin, extenuating circumstances because it is all about what we've done or are doing. Our relationship with God, being affected by sin, will show in the way that we live our lives. And Paul is now going after not the obvious fellow living in sin but the fellow who thinks that he's gotten away with things, that he's doing pretty good in and of himself.

The Bible speaks very clearly here, in these verses that we read, about two different ways of life. They're very distinct plans. Notice that one is the path of good deeds. They end in "glory and honor and immortality." Verse 7, they end in "peace" and in verse 10 as well. The other is the path of evil. It leads to "indignation and wrath and tribulation and anguish." And these are very unique paths. Now the Bible does teach proportionality of judgment. All that means is God deals with you according to what you know and holds you responsible for what you should have acted upon. The works of the saints and the works of the unbeliever are pretty good indicators of the conditions of their hearts. And according to the Bible there's no sliding scale for that. Right? You can't get into the argument that says, "I think I should go to heaven because I am committed 58% of the time." No. There will either be a moving towards or a moving away from God and thus the distinction, if you will, between the two. They are mutually exclusive: the path of the just, the path of the unjust. And we are told two things about the one on the path of the just. We are told, in verse 7, that he "does good" and that he does it "persistently." Notice the words "patient continuance in doing good." And his motivation is pretty much clear. It's "glory and honor and

immortality." It drives him to do good as God begins to do work in his life. The word "glory" or "*doxa*" refers to the transformation of my life. It refers to how my life is changed into God's image. It is a goal of the believer to be more like the Lord that has saved him. Paul wrote to the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 3:17-18), "The Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there's liberty. But we all, with open face, behold the glory of the Lord. We're changed into that same image from glory to glory, even by His Spirit." So, the desire of a believer is to be changed, right? to be more like the Lord who has saved us. And Paul points that out, and he says it is something that is found in the life of a saint who is on the path of the just, whose life is such. The ultimate glory will be one day you get to be gathered together with Him in glory.

The word "honor," "time" (pronounced tee-may) in Greek, is a word that speaks of God's approval as set in relief or against, if you will, the things that He would disapprove of in the lives of others. In other words, you seek to live your life in a way that honors God, that God is interested in blessing or interested in honoring, if you will. Jesus said, there in Matthew 25:21, that one day you show up into glory that the Lord's going to say to you, "Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things." But that's what this word "honor" means. You're seeking to not only be like the Lord but honor the Lord that has saved you. And it is a controlling principle that Paul sees in the life of a believer.

The word "immortality" literally means just that: putting off of the temporal body for the permanent model. Paul, when he wrote to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 15:51-53), said, "We're not all going to sleep, but we're all going to be changed - in the twinkling of an eye." Right? "And the corrupt is going to put on immortality." So the believer is driven by a desire to escape this place to be with God, to be delivered from this life.

In verse 10, he adds another word to eternal life. In fact, he adds three more things. He says he will seek God for eternal life, for "glory, honor," and then he adds the word "peace." Now, the question obviously becomes, as you read this, has anyone ever chosen this path for themselves and in their own strength accomplished it? Who lives this kind of life? And Paul's point is going to be you can't do that. Nobody does this! The just should live this way - for God's glory, to be changed, for eternity, to find peace and rest and eternal life. But who lives like that? And the answer is - you didn't, I didn't. No one did. No one chooses to do

good and persists in it in and of themselves. The Bible would say, "No, not one" (Romans 3:10). Nobody chooses to live their lives to glorify God, to honor Him through some path of religious morality or commitment. That doesn't happen. We don't live that way. And that's Paul's point. In fact he will say, here in verse 11, because "there is no partiality with God," and if we're all sinners, he'll say, in chapter 3:10-12, "There is none righteous, no, not one who seeks after God. All have sinned. They have altogether become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one." Well, that's all of us, then. The path of sinners is the one that we've all taken. It's the natural seeking to live apart from God's intervention. Paul calls it, here, the path of destruction.

And look what he says in verse 8 and in verse 9. We are told three things about the one who takes this road, and that's us. First, verse 8, he's "self-seeking," decidedly contrary to the two greatest commandments: you love God with all your heart and your neighbors as yourself. "I'm sorry. I'm loving me now." That's how sin drives us. This sounds much more like Satan's five "I wills" in Isaiah 14 than the heart of someone seeking God. But you see, Paul's argument is if you do these things, you could be right with God, but you can't do those things, and you don't. Secondly, notice in verse 8, he "does not obey the truth." The way it's written, he literally sets the truth of God aside. Now we read in chapter 1 of God's revelation to man within and without, and Paul said that is to no avail because there's no response. So he, because of sin, seeks himself first. He doesn't obey the truth that he has learned or the ways of God. And thirdly, notice, he "does evil" obeying, instead, unrighteousness. Unrighteousness is a big word that just means things God doesn't approve of. Righteousness God approves; unrighteousness not approved. What he does are things God does not approve. And notice that the results of his choices are given to us in two little couplets, there at the end of verse 8 and verse 9. Two sets of words: "indignation and wrath," which speak about God's fierce opposition to evil; and then the second words, "tribulation and anguish," which are the effect upon us of His judgment. Those are the same two words that are used almost exclusively in the Prophets to speak about Hell, that you end up in that place of tremendous suffering for those who deny the Lord. That is what awaits the ungodly, even those who think that they are better than others because, you know, "I'm just not that kind of sinner."

For some people, this portion of Romans is difficult because when they read through this quickly, especially to verse 16, they find the difficulty of thinking that somehow salvation must be by works. But nothing could be further from the

truth. In fact, every word that you turn in the Bible, the whole counsel of God says no one is saved apart from the work of Jesus. And it is faith in His work and never in your own work that makes the difference. And Paul will assert here that works, though they can accurately determine the validity of the faith, is evidence of our salvation, not a means to our salvation. In other words, he's going to say, "If you're walking with God, here's the life you lead. If you're not walking with God, here's the life you lead." And sinners all walk this walk, but it isn't until you meet the Lord that you begin to walk this other walk. Judgment "according to our deeds" is an Old Testament and a New Testament truth. Isaiah wrote, in chapter 3:10-11, "Say to the righteous that it shall be well with them, for they shall eat the fruit of their doings. Woe to the wicked! It shall be ill with him, for the reward of his hands shall be given him." So, behavior accurately portrays, defines, exposes, if you will, the believer and the unbeliever. Jeremiah wrote, in chapter 17:10, "I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings." Jesus said, in Matthew 16:27, "For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works." Nothing to do with salvation. But the evidence of or the means of salvation - two different things altogether.

Paul, when he wrote of salvation to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 3:8), said, "Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor." So Paul's argument is, here, if you did the right things, you could be saved. But nobody does those. Instead, we do this. And yet it is our works that, then, can define whether we have the kind of faith that saves or the kind of faith that really does not save. Jesus will say in Matthew 7:20, in the Sermon on the Mount, "You will know them by their fruits." You'll know them by their fruits. Since we know that God judges on the basis of heart condition, here's what the Lord doesn't judge on: religious profession, religious relationships, religious heritage. What He's looking for is that there is a product or a fruit or a deed or a work that emanates from, that comes as a result of, my relationship with the Lord. So Paul, when he writes to the Romans, will say, in chapter 14:12, "Each of us shall give account of himself to God." Salvation, the Bible teaches very clearly, is by faith alone. There's nothing else to add. God sent His Son, He died, you believe in Him, He transfers His righteousness to you. There's nothing you can add to that equation. And if you add anything to faith as a substitute for faith, you end up with a false gospel. If your faith is Jesus-plus, no good. Jesus-plus. However, when you have Jesus, God expects to see in your life the results of His presence with you, the results of His Spirit working in you. Belief can be claimed

and faked, but not over a lifetime. Judgment is by works; salvation is always by grace. The essence of the New Testament is God's extension of His mercy to unworthy people, and the work of His salvation is His alone. That's the essence. But there has to be a saved life that then evidences a true relationship with the Lord. James will say (James 2:17), "Faith without works is dead" or, if you will, true faith can't be hidden. You can't hide that relationship that you have with God. It will take over. Paul, here, speaks of the evidence of salvation not the means, which he will take up later. But notice he places people in two classes: those who believe the truth and follow Jesus and seek Him and those, in verse 8, who do not.

And notice he also, in verse 7, talks about the believer, and he is persistent in his good works. Notice the words "patient continuance in doing good." In other words, if you know the Lord, there's really no way that you can walk away and quit. Right? You can't stop because God requires others. So read through the Bible and watch this patient pursuit of God's best. To Abel that meant approaching God with a sacrifice that He had prescribed, rather than his brother. For Noah it meant continuing to build the Ark for 120 years when it had never rained. He was persistent in his trust in God. For Abraham it meant leaving his home and country and family to go where only God knew. He didn't. But in his confidence in the LORD, it was faith that produced behavior. For Job it meant his God-fearing, evil-rejecting life would continue even in the midst of tremendous personal sorrow and difficulty. He wouldn't balk, he didn't fold the tent up, he didn't turn away. He bowed at the LORD's feet. To Matthew, the publican, it meant that he would leave his business to follow Jesus. For Cornelius it meant that he would sit at home with patient prayer until the Lord finally sent Peter. For Lydia it meant that she went out to the river every week, praying until the Lord sent Paul to speak to her and her family and her friends, and she came to know the Lord. The believer persists in his faith, and it produces works.

Every generation has their Jabez, you know, the fellow, there in 1 Chronicles 4:9-10, who prayed and asked the LORD to enlarge his coasts and to have His hand upon him and to be sure that he didn't grieve the LORD. "God, just give me a life that won't grieve You," and it says, "The LORD granted his petition." Every generation has the Jabez who want to do better. But also every generation has the Cain and the Esau and the Pharaoh and the Jehoiakim and others. So grace and works. Grace produces work. Works can't be found that please God without grace, without faith.

If you are here tonight, and you are on the wrong path, let me give you some advice about getting back on the right path. And number one, here's your number one move. Ready? This is going to be very helpful. Recognize you're on the wrong path. No one ever got off the wrong path until they recognized that there's no hope in it in the long run. Get off that path. Second of all, admit that the path will not change itself. People do that. "Well, I'm not in the best of places. Well, things'll change. Things'll get better." No they won't! Not unless you turn. In fact, the third bit of advice is turn around, and go in the other direction. It, by the way, is the definition of repentance. Going this way? Turn around and go His way. Turn away from the things. Conversion would suggest a turning away from my ways to His. Go back to being and understanding that Jesus is the Lord who saved you, and seek to do what He says with His help for His glory. But those are decisions you have to make. Paul's argument here is God is going to "render to every man according to his deeds" because his deeds accurately reflect his heart. You can't fake those things through.

In fact, in verse 10 and verse 11, whether you're a Jew or you're a Greek, "there's no partiality with God." Here's the fourth principle of God's judgment: God's judgment is discriminating. The word "to discriminate" means "to weigh a person's advantage or without a respect of persons." The word "partiality" means "to receive someone's face." It means to be moved by what you see. The exact idea is seen in our statue of justice. It's the woman, right? She's blindfolded, and yet she's holding the scales because she's not to see who she's judging; she's supposed to be, if you will, impartial. Unfortunately, among sinful men, there's always a certain amount of showing respect of persons. There's a sinful tendency which creates and sustains the idea that I'm better than somebody else. That's what we read in the first five verses in chapter 2. People are still moved by the rich, by the educated, by the prominent, by the famous, by the influential, by the beautiful. Usually it's the poor and the ignorant and the weak that are despised and rejected. But that's not the way God works. He'll judge our eternal destinies with perfect insight. So Paul teaches the Ephesians, and he says (Ephesians 6:9), "If you're a master, forbear threatening. Know that there's a Master in heaven, and there's no respect of persons with Him." God knows what's going on, and He treats everyone the same. God is impartial, taking into account the various spiritual light that people have been given. And so notice he says, "Whether it's a Jew or whether it's a Greek, whether someone has great insight or very little, someone has great advantage or not at all," (and the Jews certainly had plenty of advantages but maybe not in the way they thought), God's judgment is going to be without

partiality. He's going to know the truth and be able to apply it to the lives of the individual. So it is all about doing, not just hearing.

And so here's what we've learned so far: God's judgment, verse 2, is according to the truth; verse 5, it is proportional to human sin; verse 5, it is according to His righteousness - He knows all things; verse 11, He's impartial; and it will be a judgment, verses 6-11, according to our deeds.

Well then we read, in verse 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 (for not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers)"..... "so if a Gentile who doesn't even have the law but who, by nature, in his conscience is aware," verse 15, "of that work of God written in his heart - the law was there, the desires of God are there, now he can make that decision, and in that day God will bring out His judgment, and every secret of man God will set before us." There are those who have the law. And I'll tell you what. From a biblical standpoint, if you were a Jew with the law, you had a lot more light than the Gentile. Right? You didn't have the insights. The possession of an open Bible greatly increases our ability to know God more fully. It's just the way it is. You come to church, you open your Bible. You're here two days before Christmas. You could be online, shopping or down at the mall wantin' to kill somebody (Laughing) or wherever you go two days before Christmas. But you're here wanting to know God. You get great advantage to having the Bible open. But light is light regardless of how dim or bright. One single light in a dark forest will draw a lot of attention. But it is that same concept that is found throughout the Scriptures. Jesus will say, in Luke 12:47-48, "A servant that knows the Lord's will and has not prepared himself, didn't do according to his will, will be beaten with many stripes." But then He goes on, and He says, "But if he didn't know, and he committed the same things that are worthy of many stripes, because he didn't know, he'd be beaten with a few." So, in other words, you're accountable for what God has made known to you. The more light, the more severe the judgment. When Jesus was going through the cities where most of His mighty works had been done, and they still wouldn't repent, He at one time, just in frustration I think, said (Matthew 11:21-24), "Woe unto you, Chorazin and Bethsaida! If the mighty works which I'd done in you had been done in Tyre, had been done in Sidon, they would have long ago repented in sackcloth. And you, Capernaum, you've been exalted to the heavens. If the work that had been done in you had been done in Sodom, they'd have made it. You were given such opportunity. You didn't respond to it." And that's Paul's point here. Regardless of

how much or how little God has given you, you're absolutely responsible for all that He has given you to the extent that you know. Without the law, great, you have the conscience from within. With the law, you have even more information, but you also come with greater, if you will, accountability. So to the one who has great revelation given, or to the one who's allowed just by conscience and creation to be accountable to God, both are without excuse, and the severity or their accountability will be exacted by God according to the advantage that's been given to them. In other words, God is fair.

The importance of the verses here is that everyone sins. We're just going to be judged - not for being just hearers - but for acting upon what we know. In fact, notice, in verse 13, he says, "for not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers." You know the law. Do you keep it? I remember years ago - and we were talking about this the other day - the Tower (Commission) Report came out about the investigation during the Reagan Administration about the arms sales to Iran. If you're a little older, you might remember that. But one of the things that Reagan said when he got interviewed, when all of the findings came out, he said, "Everyone here has fallen short." In other words, we've all kind of sinned in this. There's a culpability to every one of us. And he was right. We are all sinners. So, that's the judgment of God.

Verse 13 and down through verse 15 or so, the conditions, God will judge us on what we do with what we know. Right? God will judge us for what we do with what we know. Having God's Word, even if you're a Jew, is of no advantage to you if you don't act upon it. There's no benefit. You're here tonight. You believe in Christ. You love the Lord. You have a Bible in your hands. You can walk out of here and absolutely forget everything in it. No advantage. You've given up your advantage. You haven't given up your judgment; that's still coming. But you've given up your advantage. Hearing God's Word. There's probably no more insidious form of deceptiveness of sin or the deceitfulness of sin than the false security produced in thinking that knowing the truth is enough. It's not, and it can never be. There's a great verse in Luke 1:6, and I read it the other day. And I was studying for Christmas, and it didn't make it into the study, so I'll use it tonight. But it says of Zacharias and Elizabeth (John the Baptist's parents) - and you remember how Dad acted when he was told he was going to have a son; he kind of balked - but the introduction to their lives in chapter 1:6 of Luke is that "they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless." That's the kind of life God is looking for. Right? That's the kind of

commitment. Was he perfect? Obviously not. He's about to have war with an angel and be silenced for months on end. But his desire was to walk with God. God will judge us based on what we do with what we know. And he was certainly a great example. I think we've used the example before that a hearer is like someone who audits a class; he can come and go without consequence. But if you enroll, now you get a grade, now you have to take notes, now you have to be accountable, now you have to pass the test. The hearer is someone who doesn't want to be accountable for what he hears. In fact, the more a person hears the truth, the more accountable he becomes before the Lord. Some people think they're Christians because they go to church. Or they like Christian music. Or they have a Bible. But hearers don't stand. Jesus said so, clearly.

So, verse 13, 14, 15. It doesn't really matter what you hear. It doesn't really matter if you have a lot to hear or you have just your conscience to work with. Whether a Jew has been given the law of God and understanding, and history with God, and the promises of God, and a Bible full of prophets, and God's years of faithfulness - you have a lot to go on; or you're just a Gentile who doesn't know A from Z. You just have seen the worship at the idol factory, and yet your heart says, "This is not right. Something's wrong here." God will hold you responsible, and all of us will come up short because we need a Savior. "In the day when God will judge the secrets of men by His Son, according to the good news of His Son's coming."

Which brings us to the sixth point down in verses 14, 15 and 16. Judgment will be based on complete information about you. There isn't going to be any mistake or any need for explanation. God knows it all. The Jew has a law in hand and a work of God in his heart, but the Gentile also has a work of God within that should goad him into seeking the Lord. The law of the Gentile was not encoded; it was in his conscience. The law of the Jew was encoded. But conscience is a goad, not a guide. Right? Conscience moves you forward. The old saying, "let your conscience be your guide," is absolutely unbiblical. The conscience is God's kind of watchdog for the soul, and you can silence your conscience, you can have it seared, it can be wrecked by sin and culture and submission. If you go through the Scriptures, here're the kinds of things you'll run into. In 1 Timothy 1 and 3, it says, your conscience can be good, and yet it can resist the truth (2 Timothy 3). In 1 Corinthians 8, your conscience can be weak. In Titus 1, it can be defiled. In 1 Timothy 4, it can be seared. Remember Herod, for a long time, had a striving conscience. He would always meet with John the Baptist in secret, and he would ask him questions. And

it almost seems, if you read the text, that he was getting him close to gettin' right with God. Like he loved having these meetings because it kind of relieved some of the pressure of his conscience. But then, in some position and at some time, he silenced his conscience by imprisoning John the Baptist, and then he seared it when he executed him. He didn't want to hear it anymore. Right? That was with a conscience.....a conscience has to be educated, it has to be monitored by God's Word, it has to be submitted to the work of God's Spirit. Because a conscience..... it allows for a time of knowing right from wrong, but sin has a way of destroying even that internal monitor, if you will, and if it doesn't respond to the things of God, then it gets to be too late. You lose the ability to know what's right from wrong, and you lose a light that may turn you to the Lord.

There's a good example of how conscience works in the story of that woman caught in the act of adultery, there in John 8. And when the men dragged her to the Lord, "We caught her in the very act," I guess they lost the guy on the way. But they all gathered around and pointed their fingers at her, and yet Jesus began to write in the dirt, and I suspect - we aren't told - that He was writing down the sins of these men that He knew because He was God. And "one by one" you read, there in John 8:9, it says, "being convicted by their conscience, they began with the eldest to the last, leaving." "I can't stay....I can't....I." And then the Lord said, "Where are your accusers?" and she said, "I don't know where they're at. They're gone." And the Lord said, "I don't accuse you either, but now you've got to stop sinning. You've got to start walking with God." So, it was a pretty good example of how conscience can help us or not.

But the work of the conscience, notice, we read here, will either accuse us or it'll excuse us. A working conscience is needful for us to understand that we need a Savior. It'll help you to come to the place of the end of yourself, if you will. When your conscience gets seared, pretty soon you're able to excuse all manner of sin, but yet you innately know the difference because, verse 15, God has written upon our hearts the truth.

No one has spoken more about the moral law and the heart than, I think, I don't know if you read C.S. Lewis. He was a late Cambridge professor. But his book "*Mere Christianity*" - I don't know if you've ever plodded through it, it isn't an easy book to read - he begins with the correct assumption or observation that when one angry person argues with another, there's always an appeal made to some standard of behavior that they can both agree on. And that's usually what needs to happen

with you and God. You have to agree with Him about you if you're going to go forward. We say things like, "How would you feel if this happened to you?" or "Take my seat." "That's my seat. I was here first. Let me sit there. Leave me alone. He's not hurting you. Give me some of that pie. I gave you some last time." You know, the things.....you begin to agree with one another, if you will, about basic standards. So the moral law of God is agreeable in the heart of every man, and Paul's point is very simple: the fruit of any revelation of God, much or little, will be faith which produces good works. And if that isn't happening, it's because you don't have a Savior. You don't have a new heart. You don't have a new spirit.

For the one who turns to God's Word or has the law, the great advantage is that he can quickly move towards the Lord because he knows so much about Him. But he obviously finds greater judgment if he ignores it. To the one who only has his conscience, God has given him enough light to seek Him.

In the end, verse 16, "God will judge the secrets of men's hearts." Now Paul liked that. When the Corinthians started to accuse him of things that he hadn't done - in fact, they turned on him in great numbers for a time - Paul said, in 1 Corinthians 4:5, "You can judge anything before its time, but when the Lord comes, He'll bring to light the hidden things of darkness. He'll make known the counsels of men's hearts. And now everyone can have their own praise from the Lord." In other words, God's going to make it clear when He comes. That's the point that he found great comfort in. David said to his son, Solomon (1 Chronicles 28:9), "If you obey the LORD with a perfect heart, with a willing mind, God searches your heart, He understands your imagination. If you seek Him, He'll be found by you. If you forsake Him, He'll forsake you." So, we should be profoundly honest about our relationship with God because He knows everything. And Paul is driving home the point - he will by the time we get to verse 21 of chapter 3 which, to me, is the most glorious part of the book - he will say to us that God, because He knows everything, requires of us honesty and admission of sin, and we should turn to Him because He's the One who's going to judge us with righteousness and truth.

The seventh principle, which we won't cover tonight but we'll look at next week in our final Wednesday night of the year, is that God's judgment is based on reality and not just simply being moved by the clothes of the Christian or the religious profession. In other words, your religion won't save you. And that truly is an argument from the Jewish perspective. "We're a Jew, we're God's people. God has

chosen us. We have a higher position." And Paul goes, "Nnnnot so much." From the raunchy sinner to the respectable sinner to the religious sinner, God help us.

So, hard stuff to think through but isn't it the case that we need to see - and everyone should see - that you may not be the chapter 1 guy, you may be the chapter 2 guy, or maybe you'll be a chapter 3 guy. But eventually you're going to have to get to verse 9 (chapter 3) where it says we've all sinned, and there's none righteous, but God has a plan to deliver even the likes of us. I like that. That's why we have Christmas. God's plan's workin' out just fine. We're goin' to heaven because of Jesus. Any my slate might not be clean with you, but it's clean with Him.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson
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