

## Condemnation of the Self-Righteous Moralist – Part 3

Romans 2:6-16

Will you join me by taking your Bible and turn to Romans chapter two? This is the third and final in a series in Romans chapter two verses 11 through 16 regarding the condemnation of the self-righteous moralist.

What a joy it has been, thus far, to go verse by verse through this great epistle. And we come, once again, to this text and I might say some passages are easier to preach than others. Some have more life to them because of what is in them than others. Some are very intense doctrinally. But regardless of what the text has before us, I must preach it. And this is one of those that requires you think very carefully about some doctrinal issues as you will see.

But let me read it to you again. We are going to focus primarily on verses 11 through 16, but we must get the flow beginning in verse one of Romans two.

Therefore you are without excuse, every man of you who passes judgment, for in that you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. And we know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things. And do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment upon those who practice such things and do the same yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance? But 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, who WILL RENDER TO EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS: to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation. There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek, but glory and honor and peace to every man who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For there is no partiality with God. 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; for not the hearers of the Law are just before God, but the doers of the Law will be justified. For 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, 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, on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus.<sup>1</sup>

Allow your mind to transport you back to Rome in AD 58, the most glorious, the most magnificent, the most powerful city in all the world in that time. And you have come to

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 2:1-16.

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probably a portico, a large patio of a person who is following Christ. And there is a gathering of these believers there and you have heard that a lady named Phoebe, a deaconess from a church near Corinth has been entrusted with a letter from the famous apostle Paul, that great converted rabbi that has done many miracles and is a spokesman for the Lord Jesus Christ.

And you are anxious to hear what this letter has to say. And so you come into this area. There would have been, we believe, two congregations at Rome during this time, but you have chosen one of them. And you come in and you see people very much like you would see today. They are seated around on benches, some sitting on the ground finding a nice shady spot, the warm breeze is blowing. And you look around and you see that there is a group of Judean Jews that are seated there who were converted at Pentecost in Jerusalem. And there are also Gentile converts, men and women, young people, young and old from various cultures, various religious backgrounds. And you look around and you can see literally slaves sitting right next to noblemen.

It is an amazing sight, totally foreign to the culture. And you can also look around the edges and you can see some Jews with their arms folded kind of hanging out to see what is going on here, people that don't believe any of this, the self-righteous moralists and other Gentiles who are curious, idol worshippers wondering what is going on. They have heard about this Christ who supposedly rose from the dead.

As you come into the little group you realize that the place is absolutely electric with anticipation. A group of elders come forward, offer a welcome. They lead in prayer. Songs are sung. And then this precious letter is introduced by the teaching shepherd, a letter that is inspired, he says, by God himself.

So a hush comes over the audience. And with trembling hands, this teaching shepherd adjusts the sacred papyrus letter. He clears his throat, takes a deep breath and he begins to read, read what I have just read to you this morning.

By the mercies of God we see that God here reveals more of himself, more of himself to those early saints and to the millions that would follow.

You see, God knew that these people lacked construction. They understood the basic gospel, but they needed apostolic construction on foundational issues. The Jews that had come to Christ had to somehow harmonize the Old Testament Scriptures with the New Testament gospel. And the Gentiles needed clarification about how to live for Christ in their pagan world.

But primarily, the Holy Spirit new that they needed clarification on the foundational issue and that is the doctrine of the righteousness of God whereby God justifies sinners who are guilty and condemned before him by grace alone through faith alone.

How does this happen?

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Now, obviously, this is a very hard pill to swallow for the Jews. They don't believe any of it. They believe you have to keep the law. What is this grace stuff?

By the time the shepherd finishes reading these 16 verses here in chapter two, there is a noticeable tension that grips the patio. Suddenly it becomes abundantly clear that regardless of who you are, no matter how religious you claim to be, you are also condemned before a holy God. You are condemned and therefore in need of the righteousness of Christ for three reasons.

By way of review, the first reason is because of your self-righteous judgment. We saw that in verses one through three. They had an outward morality and they were masters at fooling themselves and everyone around them, believing that somehow they were also fooling God. But God could see the heart. He could see that they practiced the same sins that they condemned others for.

And, secondly, they are condemned because of their self-satisfied disregard for grace in verses four and five. They took for granted and misinterpreted “the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance,”<sup>2</sup> in verse four.

They had that debit and credit system of works righteousness where they believed that their good deeds would somehow offset their bad, make them acceptable to God. And as long as everything is going good in life that God must be well pleased. But now in this letter, God exposes that charade.

In reality what was going on is they had presumed upon the grace of God, not realizing that his forbearance was giving them an opportunity to repent and believe the Lord Jesus Christ, that he was suspending their punishment in hopes that they would believe.

You could even hear some gasps, I am sure, when the pastor read verse five that, “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.”<sup>3</sup>

But the inspired apostle had yet another reason why the self-righteous moralist is also under divine condemnation and that is because of his self-seeking works.

Now, remember. This was a secret that they thought no one knew, the idea of their motivation behind their good deeds.

Verse six says that God “WILL RENDER TO EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS: to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, [they will receive] eternal life.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Romans 2:4.

<sup>3</sup> Romans 2:5.

<sup>4</sup> Romans 2:6-7.

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But, verse eight, “to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation.”<sup>5</sup>

Now every honest hypocrite in that crowd would have been squirming at this point, realizing that he was in serious trouble, because if all of this is true then even his most wonderful deeds, his best deeds, his most righteous religious works would not be enough to be pleasing to God, because ultimately they were not motivated out of a genuine love for God, a desire to give him glory. And he is beginning to see that unless God has mercy on him, he has no hope. And that is exactly what Paul is trying to produce in the hearts of the hearers.

But, bear in mind, by exposing the depth of man’s depravity, it will drive him to his knees before the cross. That is what Paul is trying to do here by the power of the Spirit. And if we believe the gospel, then we are transformed, then when we do righteous deeds we will do them, not in the flesh, but in the power of the Spirit.

So although we are saved by grace alone through faith alone, we are judged by our works as we studied last week. To be more precise, we are judged by the goodness and the motivation of our works.

We either serve God or we serve ourselves.

For those who serve themselves, verse nine, “There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek.”<sup>6</sup>

Verse 10.

...but glory and honor and peace to every man who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For there is no partiality with God.<sup>7</sup>

And this brings us to our purpose today.

Now when the self-righteous Jew would have heard this he would say, “Wait, whoa, whoa. Wait a minute. What do you mean there is no partiality? I am not like the Gentile. I mean, I serve the true God. I am part of the covenant, the covenant that God gave to Abraham and to David. I am part of the chosen people. Furthermore, the Gentiles don’t have the law. So they can’t possibly obey God. They can’t possibly become the recipients of his blessing.”

Well, anticipating this the Holy Spirit speaks through his inspired servant and says in verse 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.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Romans 2:8.

<sup>6</sup> Romans 2:9.

<sup>7</sup> Romans 2:10-11.

<sup>8</sup> Romans 2:12.

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Now may I remind you about the law? The law refers to the commands that God gave to Israel through his servant Moses on Mount Sinai. It was the divine standard of God's righteousness and also the penalties that would be the consequence for violating his standard. It was given to govern his people. And its purpose was to give men, according to Romans 3:20, a full knowledge of sin.

Verse 19. "...that every mouth may be closed, and all the world may become accountable to God."<sup>9</sup>

It was given to prepare men for the gospel of Christ. But, as you will recall, the law was extremely onerous. It was impossible to obey. Peter acknowledge that it was "a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear,"<sup>10</sup> Acts 15.

And, of course, this makes the gospel all the more precious. That is why Jesus would say in Matthew 11, "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest."<sup>11</sup>

But I want you to notice. Here in the first part of verse 12 we learn that even the Gentiles who have never heard of the law will still be held responsible for violating the law.

It says, "For all who have sinned without the Law will also perish without the Law."<sup>12</sup>

Now why is this?

And the answer is: Because God has written his law in the conscience of every man.

Drop down to verse 14.

For 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, 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.<sup>13</sup>

The word "conscience" in the original language *suneidhsiv* (soon-i'-day-sis), is a very interesting term. It means co-perception or co-knowledge or knowledge with. It is the idea here that every man has an instinctive moral consciousness that agrees with the righteousness of God. It is something that we have innately.

Now although most of the world has never known, never read the written law of God, nevertheless, they know the difference between right and wrong. No matter where you

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<sup>9</sup> Romans 3:19.

<sup>10</sup> Acts 15:10.

<sup>11</sup> Matthew 11:28.

<sup>12</sup> Romans 2:12.

<sup>13</sup> Romans 2:14-15.

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go you will see that. No matter how primitive the culture, all men are at least aware and in some degree embrace the divine standard of right and wrong. It is manifested in his conduct. And a man's conscience, now, is that which will hold him to the highest standard. And whenever that standard is violated, our emotions will respond with feelings of guilt.

Think of the conscience as an idiot light on the car. Do you know what an idiot light is? That is what we used to call them. I don't know what they call them now. You know, the little lights that come on when you are driving and I know whenever I see a red engine sign come up on my dashboard, I know that there is something going on inside and I need to pull over and check it out. All right?

Think of guilt as being that idiot light. Your conscience is telling you here that you need to pull over and examine something. That is what is going on. You don't want to ignore it. And, over time, if a person does ignore his conscience consistently violates it, then those feelings of guilt will gradually cease. The conscience will cease to function. It will become dull. It will become insensitive.

We would call that person in our culture a sociopath, somebody who has no conscience. It is like those in Romans one whom God has given over to a worthless mind, people like the leader of Khadafy, I think is his name, over in Libya who would just kill his own people and have no problem doing so.

1 Timothy four verse two Paul, you will recall, described the heretics and the hypocrites and liars as those who were "seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron."<sup>14</sup>

The term "seared" is *kausthriazw* (kow-tay-ree-ad'-zo) in the original language. We get our word to cauterize from that. And the idea here is even as the nerves would cease to function if our flesh is seared with a hot branding iron, so, too, will our conscience be seared if we persistently ignore it.

Now you will recall in chapter one the apostle has already established the fact that God has revealed himself to every human being through creation and through conscience. He has made that case very clear. And for that reason every man is without excuse.

And now here in Romans two and verse 15 Paul is saying that even the most pagan Gentile has an instinctive moral conscience. There is a measure of the divine law that activates his conscience. So he, too, is without excuse.

Part of what Paul is saying here is God has only one standard of righteousness. He does not have two. There is not one standard for the Jew and another one of the Gentile, because there is no partiality with God.

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<sup>14</sup> 1 Timothy 4:2.

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Now, bear in mind, although that is true, we do see in Scripture that God gives consideration for the varying levels of spiritual light that a person is exposed to. For example, we see that Scripture teaches there are varying degrees of punishment in hell. You will recall in Matthew 11 the Jewish cities of Chorazin, of Bethsaida and Capernaum, three cities at the northern end of the Sea of Galilee where Jesus did most of his miracles, where most of his ministry occurred. Those three cities saw, first hand, miracle after miracle. And yet still they hardened their heart in unbelief.

And so Jesus said in Matthew 11 verse 21, “For if the miracles had occurred in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.”<sup>15</sup>

Now Tyre and Sidon were notoriously wicked Gentile cities that the Jews despised.

Jesus went on to say, “Nevertheless I say to you, it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment, than for you.”<sup>16</sup>

So, dear friends, the divine principle is basically this. The greater the light of truth, the greater the responsibility to respond to it. And the corollary is simply this. The greater the light rejected, the greater the judgment. That is the point.

Those privileged Jewish cities that witnessed the glory of Christ, those Jews who were the custodians of the law who remained indifferent to Christ will suffer an even greater punishment than those pagan cities that never had that level of divine revelation.

The same principle is taught in Luke 12:42-48 in Jesus’ contrast of the faithful versus the unfaithful servants.

And you may recall there Jesus distinguished between punishments of many blows versus few blows that would be determined by the degree of knowledge that the unfaithful servants had concerning their master’s will.

Now, to be sure, the Jews had been given the law. And they had every opportunity to understand Jehovah God. In fact, the Lord came and the apostles we see over and over to the Jew first and then to the Gentile. They had all of these advantages. But we see in Scripture that God will judge according to the standard that a man has, not a standard that he does not have. And so therefore even with the Gentiles he will be without excuse.

Now I want you to be careful here. As I was meditating on this passage I was reminded of what I heard in different quarters from time to time in evangelical circles where armchair theologians come up with some interesting ideas about certain doctrines.

Perhaps you have heard people say, “Well, those who have never heard the gospel will be saved if they follow the light they have been given.”

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<sup>15</sup> Matthew 11:21.

<sup>16</sup> Matthew 11:22.

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I have heard that on a number of occasions. I remember having that conversation with one friend and I said, “Really? Where do you find that in Scripture?”

And the answer is, “It is not in Scripture. It kind of sounds good.”

You know, that has never happened. It has never happened because by man’s very nature he cannot see the light. Nowhere in Scripture do you have one example of an unregenerate man who is dead in his trespasses and sin who is blind because of his flesh, who has been double blinded because of Satan ever living up to the light that he has been given.

Again, salvation is always by grace through faith. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 4:3 that “gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ.”<sup>17</sup>

You see, again, this amazing mystery of salvation. It is God who initiates. It is not man. And if God doesn’t do something, man will not be saved.

It is for this reason that Paul went on to rejoice in verse six of 2 Corinthians four saying, “For God, who said, ‘Light shall shine out of darkness,’ is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.”<sup>18</sup>

So ultimately it is God who shines the light of regenerating grace upon the sinner, not the double blinded sinner who is dead in his sin who somehow sees the light and chooses to follow it. Again, Paul will make it clear, Romans chapter nine and verse 16, speaking of salvation saying, “It does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs.”<sup>19</sup>

In other words, salvation is not based upon man’s human effort. It is not based upon his enlightenment. But, he says, “On God who has mercy.”<sup>20</sup>

Therein is the humbling reality of sovereign grace. My, what a humbling doctrine that is. You see, only when God gives sight to the blind will that person be able to behold the wrath of God and run to the cross for mercy and grace.

Well, all this exposure and talk of condemnation it is even hard for us to hear, right? And we have been saved by his grace. And, of course, it causes us to rejoice all the more in his grace. But it was especially hard for those people standing around the edges with their arms folded. This was really tough to hear, especially when it comes to that part here in verse 12 regarding God not showing partiality, telling them that “all who have sinned

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<sup>17</sup> 2 Corinthians 4:3-4.

<sup>18</sup> 2 Corinthians 4:6.

<sup>19</sup> Romans 9:16.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.



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without the Law will also perish without the Law [referring to the Gentiles]; and all who have sinned under the Law will be judged by the Law.”<sup>21</sup> There he is speaking to the Jew.

And, of course, Paul has already alluded to the horror of their eternal fate in verses eight and nine.

He goes on and he says, verse 13, “For not the hearers of the Law are just before God, but the doers of the Law will be justified.”<sup>22</sup>

Oh, my. Here is the death blow to the legalistic Jew to the legalistic moralistic down through the centuries, because they knew that they were hearers, but not doers of the law.

Now it is interesting. Paul here is emphasizing the need for a listener to really hear with intensity, to listen carefully. Because you are going to be held accountable for what you hear.

This last week my father was speaking to the special forces group at Fort Campbell. And as I was mingling with the soldiers I began to realize that this one man that was talking to me was the leader of the whole group and I didn’t know that. I don’t fully understand all of the little things that they have on them with their camouflage suits, but I began to notice that this one man had several men around him at all time and any time he said anything they would come up and they would listen intently because he was a brigadier general.

And this is the type of listening that we need to have, but often don’t have. And the Jews were guilty of not having that kind of hearing. It would be like the difference between a person who goes to a college class and just audits a class versus a person who is taking it for credit who is going to hang on every word and write everything down to make sure they get it right.

You see, Paul was a former rabbi. And he knew how the game was played. You see, Jews would come in to the worship services and they would merely audit the long winded pontifications of the rabbis who typically just made up a bunch of stuff and then they would also read the Old Testament Scriptures without any interpretation, without any application and they are trying not to yawn and, you know, the wives are doing this. You have got the same thing going on here from time to time.

And basically people would hear the word and it would go in one ear and out the other.

You will recall what James had to say about this in James 1:22. He says, “But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Romans 2:12.

<sup>22</sup> Romans 2:13.

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In other words “delude” is referring to those who deliberately deceive themselves. You kind of pretend like you are really listening and this is really important, but in reality you really don’t care.

For example, some of you will hear about the horrors of hell. You will hear about the glories of grace, the power of the gospel and yet you still will not repent and follow Christ. You are a hearer, not a doer. And even for believers you can take various commands that the Lord gives us. We were talking about one yesterday, that is that the Lord would call us to make disciples.

Well, you all have heard that. Yet I would humbly say to you in love that there is probably only a handful of you in this room that take that command seriously. You are a hearer. You are not a doer. You have got 1000 ridiculous self serving reasons as to why you don’t do that. You have got an ardent zeal for all kinds of other things within the Church and outside the Church, but when it comes to that...

“Oh, I am... I have got other things that I need to do.”

And ultimately the world revolves around you, not around Christ so you are a hearer and not a doer.

Now this is the mindset that has gone on for centuries and this is what Paul is speaking to here.

By the way James went on to say in verse 23 of James one:

For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was.<sup>24</sup>

You see, the mirrors of those days were very primitive. They were polished bronze or brass and when you looked into them you didn’t really get a real clear reflection of who you were. And then even at that when you turn away you kind of forget and maybe you want to forget what you just saw.

That is the idea here. If a person merely hears, just kind of audits the Word of God, but has no desire to obey it, no desire to intently focus upon it, then what he has heard is nothing more than an obscure image of the Word and he is quickly going to forget the magnificent truths that should grip his soul. Instead he just passively hears and moves on without any faith and obedience.

The careless man, dear friends, looks casually and he sees poorly and he remembers little and he obeys even less.

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<sup>24</sup> James 1:23-24.

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James went on to say in verse 25, “But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man shall be blessed in what he does.”<sup>25</sup>

And I might add by implication, the forgetful hearer, the auditor, will not be blessed in what he does. So examine your heart accordingly.

So back to Romans two. Paul goes for the jugular here in verse 13. He says, “For not the hearers of the Law are just before God, but the doers of the Law will be justified.”<sup>26</sup>

Now there is an important distinction here about the law that is taught all through Scripture. We know that the law is perfect. It is without flaw, in fact. We read in Psalm 19:7, “The law of the LORD is perfect.”<sup>27</sup>

We know that. And yet what is fascinating is the law cannot save a man.

Paul said in Romans 7:12 that “the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.”<sup>28</sup>

And then he said in verse 14, “that the Law is spiritual; but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin.”<sup>29</sup>

You see, the weakness to save was not in the law, but in man. That is why Paul would say in Romans chapter eight and verse three that the law was weak through the flesh.

You see, it is for this reason that the Son of God had to come to earth and live a perfect life and fulfill the law. He had to come, as Romans 8:3 says, to do what the law could not do.

Paul said this:

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, in order that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.<sup>30</sup>

Now, I must digress here on an important topic for just a moment because I want to make sure that you clearly understand this issue. Some will argue that now because of grace

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<sup>25</sup> James 1:25.

<sup>26</sup> Romans 2:13.

<sup>27</sup> Psalm 19:7.

<sup>28</sup> Romans 7:12.

<sup>29</sup> Romans 7:14.

<sup>30</sup> Romans 8:3-4.

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that God has relaxed the demands of the law to accommodate the weakness of man so that somehow we could keep it.

You know, that is indicative of our society, isn't it? Let's keep lowering the standard so everybody wins. You know, you have got little Johnny who comes up to bat and he strikes out every time. He could sit in a boat and not hit the water with a ball. He can't catch. And after the game mommy and daddy say, "Good game, son." And he gets a trophy.

But that is the world we live in. If people can't pass a test—and we have seen this in the news here lately—let's lower the standards so that everybody can, you know, make the cut.

So the question is: Does God really relax the demands of the law because of grace? Not at all. Think about it. What an assault that is upon both law and grace. In fact, Paul easily refutes such a ridiculous notion in Galatians three verse 21. He says, "For if a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law. But the Scripture has shut up all men under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe."<sup>31</sup>

In other words, dear friends, the demands of the law are so great that they imprison man in a dungeon of despair and sentence him to death. And because of this the promise by faith in Christ is all the more glorious. Only the promise of grace can set that prisoner free. And here, again in Romans two verses 11 through 12 Paul argues the same principle.

There is only one standard. There is only one law. There is not two separate sets of standards. Nor does God in any way lower his standards for the weakness of sin.

May I add to this by saying that Scripture is clear that God is immutable? He does not change. That is part of the essence of his nature. And his law is an expression of his holy, immutable nature. Moreover the very throne of God would be shaken were he to somehow diminish the demands of the law because on Psalm 89:14 we read, "Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Thy throne."<sup>32</sup>

You see, the foundation of his very throne is anchored in the inviolability of the law. So he would never tamper with his law to accommodate the weakness of sinners.

On the day of judgment, whether Jew or Gentile, both will be held accountable for the law which God had given them whether it was written in a book or inscribed upon their heart and conscience.

Again, this is a very dangerous heresy that I hear from time to time. It is a slippery slope. Think about it. Had God relaxed the stipulations and the penalties of his law, the good

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<sup>31</sup> Galatians 3:21-22.

<sup>32</sup> Psalm 89:14.

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news of the gospel would be diminished, right? It would be diminished. Why? Because if the righteous demands of the law were in any way relaxed, the debt for our sins would have been lessened and Christ's payment reduced.

Would you have me believe that somehow Christ purchased my redemption at a bargain?

Scriptures teach that he bore the full wrath of God for you and for me personally in his body. Jesus paid it all. The debt was never reduced. Jesus paid it in full.

Galatians 3:13 we read, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us."<sup>33</sup>

You see, friends, to relax the law is to impugn the character of God, saying that he is not immutable, that he can change. To relax the law is to undermine the foundation of his throne. It is to diminish grace and to relax the law, worse yet, is to mitigate the efficacy of the atonement. Surely we would not do that.

Isaiah 53 verse six says, "But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him."<sup>34</sup>

So we must guard ourselves against such false gospels that constantly bombard us.

And so Paul's argument is iron clad. God is going to judge every man according to his deeds. Every man is under condemnation of God. He will be judged impartially by the law of God whether written on stone or on the heart.

And then finally notice the last thing here Paul adds to this explanation of the principles of divine judgment here, especially on the self-righteous mort.

He says in verse 16, "...on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus."<sup>35</sup>

Here Paul is speaking of the great white throne judgment according to Revelation 20, that time when heaven and earth will have fled away, when the sea and the grave will have given up their dead, when the dead, great and small, will stand before the throne and the books will be opened. And, according to John in Revelation 20, "another book will be opened which is the book of life and the dead will be judged from the things which were written in the books according to their deeds."<sup>36</sup>

Here Paul is referring to the judgments of the unbelieving dead of all ages, a day that—according to the apostle Paul as we read earlier this morning in Acts 17 when he was speaking to the Athenians—a day that is fixed "in which He will judge the world in

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<sup>33</sup> Galatians 3:13.

<sup>34</sup> Isaiah 53:6.

<sup>35</sup> Romans 2:16.

<sup>36</sup> Revelation 20:12.

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righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.”<sup>37</sup>

And who is that man? It is the Lord Jesus.

Think about it. Regardless of rank or nation, regardless of profession or religion, the secret crimes and motives of all men will one day be exposed in the light of omniscient holiness from Pharaoh to Nero, from Hitler to Stalin, from Hollywood celebrities to housewives. Every man who is not clothed in the righteousness of Christ will stand before the Lord Jesus Christ, mighty men will fear and tremble. Great kings and conquerors will be reduced to quivering little maggots, their bodies now suited for eternal torment in hell.

Sadly some of you sit here today and you are deceived by your religiosity. You think you have got all the answers. You play the game. You talk the talk. And your deception is reinforced by your public religion. You have got a lot of people fooled, but you don't fool God. And unless you humble yourself in broken repentance, you, too, will one day stand in the vast assembly of the damned awaiting your sentence.

“Yes, but I was a good and moral person.”

Yes, but you did it in the flesh. You didn't do it in the Spirit. Your motives were not to glorify God, but to glorify yourself.

You see, when God looks at you he is not looking for your righteousness, but at the righteousness of Christ. He will look for the precious blood that washed away sin.

Because you see, dear friends, only in Christ is a man made righteous.

I love what Paul says. He says in verse 16 here, “according to my gospel.”<sup>38</sup>

Now obviously he is not saying that he is the author of the gospel. But he is referring to what a precious possession it is to him. He knew that were it not for the gospel of grace he, too, would one day stand among the condemned.

Can't you see him just grasping the Word with both hands, looking heavenward and with tears running down his cheeks crying out, “Oh, thank you, dear Jesus, for your saving grace. You accomplished what I could never do. Though I did my very best, though I was fastidious in keeping the law, I fell infinitely short to your righteousness. Thank you for the righteousness of Christ and thank you for entrusting me with the sacred truth. Thank you for my gospel.”

For this reason Paul could say in Philippians three verse seven:

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<sup>37</sup> Acts 17:31.

<sup>38</sup> Romans 2:16.

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But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith.<sup>39</sup>

And, beloved, how fitting, as Paul tells us here, that Jesus would be that judge, the one who was despised and rejected by men, the one who was tempted in all ways yet without sin, the one who was beaten and mocked, who suffered and died, how fitting that the one whose saving work was rejected be the impartial judge to expose all that he sees. All those sins committed in secret were yet committed in the full face of his holiness. How fitting that the Lord of lords would have his glory enhanced through this righteous indignation and vengeance, to see that hand that was pierced wave away the wicked, the same hand that before was summoning them to repentance, mercy and grace.

Make no mistake. A day is coming, my friends, a day is coming.

Charles Spurgeon put it so well. He says, “The Lord keeps the scaffold standing till he hath built up the fabric of his Church. Not yet are the elect all called out from among the guilty sons of men. Not yet are all the redeemed with blood redeemed with power and brought forth out of the corruption of the age into the holiness in which they walk with God. Therefore the Lord waiteth for a while.”

My friends, this is the warning that the apostle gave those early saints and sinners, the same warning that we hear today. Apart from Christ you stand under divine condemnation. Won't you hear the words of Jesus who said this?

“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.”<sup>40</sup>

That is my prayer for you today.

Let's pray together.

*Lord, these are such sobering truths that drive every saint to their face. As we are humbled by the glory of your grace, Lord, we praise you. We thank you. And we plead with you for those who may even be in this room today that really have never been broken over their sin and pleaded for the mercy that you would give them. Lord, may be today be the day that they confess and repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ? We pray all of this in the name of Jesus and for his glory. Amen.*

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<sup>39</sup> Philippians 3:7-9.

<sup>40</sup> John 5:24.

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