

Intro: The gospel of Jesus Christ is good news! By definition, it is good news for that is what the word means. By examination, it is good news for the life-changing power of the gospel is obvious. I never cease to be amazed at the inherent power of the good news. I have watched individuals walk into my study shackled by the chains of sin, and seen those same individuals leave as a new creation. I didn't produce the change. The good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ did! The gospel is good news.

But listen. We will never appreciate the good news of the gospel until we grasp the bad news. In fact, we will never even understand the good news until we come to grips with the bad news. How do I know that? Because of what the Word of God says in Romans 2.

What is the bad news? You say, "The bad news is what's happening in our world today. The situations in Haiti, Rwanda, Bosnia. The escalating crime rate, rampant immorality, and breakdown of the family in our country. That's bad news." No one would argue with that. But that's not the bad news Paul reveals in Romans 2. Rather, it has to do with an event that will take place in the future, an event that will have eternal implications, an event known as the Judgment Day.

What does the Bible have to say about the Judgment Day?

Proposition: There are three shocking truths about the Judgment Day revealed in Romans 2:12-16.

- I. There will be no exceptions on Judgment Day (12).
 - A. Category #1: Those without the Law
 - B. Category #2: Those with the Law
- II. There will be no excuses on Judgment Day (13-15).
 - A. The Jews had the light of the Law (13).
 - B. The Gentiles had the light of Conscience (14-15).
- III. There will be no exchanges on Judgment Day (16).
 - A. Reason #1: Because of Who the Judge is
 - B. Reason #2: Because of what will be judged

Conclusion: Three lessons to learn...

1. The greater the privilege, the greater the responsibility.
2. We'll never appreciate the good news until we grasp the bad news.
3. It's possible to have false assurance about the Judgment Day.

Before considering these three shocking truths about the Judgment Day, we must ask ourselves an important question. Why is Paul writing about the Judgment Day to begin with in his letter to the Romans? The reason relates to his purpose. The theme of Romans is the righteousness of God. How does a person obtain a "right

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standing" with God? Only through the gospel of Jesus Christ (1:16-17). Who needs this righteousness? The heathen do, no doubt, a point Paul makes perfectly clear in chapter 1 (see 1:18). An immoral person needs God's righteousness. But so does a moral person, as Paul substantiates in chapter 2.

Beginning in 2:1, Paul dialogues with an imaginary moralist, perhaps a religious Jew. He knows what the moralist is thinking, "I agree that the heathen need help. God's going to judge them for their wickedness. But I'm OK. I may not be perfect, but my good outweighs my bad." Paul's aim in ch 2 is to show that the moralist needs the righteousness of God through the gospel, too. Why? Because just like the heathen, he too has an appointment at the Judgment of God.

Notice the emphasis on God's judgment in ch 2: V 2 "But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth." V 3 "And thinkest thou this...that thou shalt escape the judgment of God?" V 5 You "treasure up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God."

It's this theme of the Judgment Day that Paul unveils in vv 12-16. Notice the connective word "for" that begins v 12. Here's the first shocking truth.

I. There will be no exceptions on Judgment Day (12).

In v 11, we learned that, "There is no respect of persons with God." God's judgment is impartial and totally just. There will be no exceptions on that day. Now in v 12, we find out that there are two categories of people in the world. V 12 "For as many as have sinned without law..." Paul divides all mankind into two categories here.

A. Category #1: Those without the Law

V 12 "For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law." What does Paul mean by "law" in v 12? Civil laws? Laws established by the Roman government? No. He has in mind the Torah, God's revelation to His chosen people the Jews. The law refers to the Law of Moses, technically the first five books of our English Bible, yet by extension the entire Hebrew Scriptures. Through Moses, God revealed His requirements for Israel. He revealed His holy standard, what He expects out of the people He created. The Law is the reflection of His righteous character. The essence of the Law is the Ten Commandments, which are fleshed out in the Pentateuch, applied to contemporary life by the prophets, and later summarized by Jesus into two great commands: Love God, and love your neighbor.

But not everyone knows the Law. Paul says the first category of people are those who are "without law." Who are they? The Gentiles. Non-Jews. What have they done? They "have sinned without law." What will happen to them? They "will perish without law." The word "sin" (greek "hamarton") means "to miss the mark, to err." The Gentiles missed God's mark. They have fallen short of God's expectation. So they will perish.

Objection: "If they didn't have the Law, on what basis will God judge them?" We'll see in a moment. At this point, notice the second category.

B. Category #2: Those with the Law

V 12 "And as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law." The second category refers to people who have the Law. Who are they? The Jews, the apple of God's eye, God's chosen people.

What was the problem of the Jews? V 12 says they "sinned in the Law," that is, they sinned in the sphere of the Law. They knew what God expected, but they missed the mark anyway. In the words of James 4:17, "To him that knows to do good, and does it not, to him it is sin." The Jewish problem was not lack of knowledge, but lack of obedience. Therefore, what will happen to them according to v 12? "They shall be judged by the Law."

What's the point? There will be no exceptions on Judgment Day. Paul is not seeking to lay out an end-times timeline here. Rather his aim is to make it clear that in the end, two groups will be judged and found deficient: Those without the Law, and those with the Law. God will judge the Gentiles. God will judge the Jews. God will judge the heathen. God will judge the humanist. God will judge the immoralist. God will judge the moralist. God will judge the rapist, the dictator, the serial killer. God will judge the philanthropist who gave millions to charity. There will be no exceptions on Judgment Day.

Children love to play a game called "Freeze Tag." I played it this week with my daughters. Inevitably during the game, someone yells, "You didn't get me. I was on base. You can't get me when I'm on base!"

Lots of people have a "freeze tag" view of God's judgment. One person says, "I've got the Bible, so God won't judge me." Another says, "I never knew the Bible, so God can't judge me." No. There will be no "base", no exceptions on Judgment Day (Heb 9:27).

A second shocking truth is revealed in vv 13-15.

II. There will be no excuses on Judgment Day (13-15).

READ vv 13-15

No one will have an excuse on the Day they stand before their Maker. That holds true for the Jews, and the Gentiles. Why will there be no excuses? V 13 tells us why there will be no excuse for the Jews.

A. The Jews had the light of the Law (13).

The Jews were tedious with the Mosaic Law. Their scribes copied it. Their teachers taught it. Their rabbis read it aloud in the synagogue every week. So the Jews had the light of the Law. They heard it. They memorized it. They sang it in their worship. They taught it to their children. But something was missing.

They didn't DO it. V 13 "For not the hearers of the Law are just before God, but the doers of the Law shall be justified." Be careful to not misread this statement. Paul is not saying a person is made right with God by doing the Law. For one reason, no man (except Jesus) ever kept the Law perfectly. For another reason, keeping God's Law doesn't merit eternal life.

Doing the Law doesn't make a person righteous, but it does do this. It reveals the condition of a person's heart.

Lots of people have the mistaken idea that just because they "approve" of God's Word, they are Ok. They put a few dollars in the offering plate to show they approve of God's Word. They sing a few songs of praise each week. They may even do a few deeds of Christian service. They approve of God's Word, but they don't obey it with their lives. They don't live in light of the truth they possess.

Many of the Jews of Paul's day looked down their noses on their pagan neighbors. "They worship idols, but we worship the God of Abraham. They have statues, but we have the Law!" Paul says, "Fine, but you're forgetting one thing. Possessing the Law is one thing, but practicing it is another."

The Phillips paraphrase of v 13 hits the nail on the head, "It is not familiarity with the Law that justifies a man in the sight of God, but obedience to it." The Jews had a religion of outward action, lots of religious "bells and whistles". But they were corrupt on the inside.

Friend, you can be moral on the outside, but God looks past your moral facade. You can have a strict list of do's and don'ts that impress men, but God's not impressed. He looks at your heart (Heb 4:12). He looks at your life. He looks to see if you exhibit an obedience that comes from a heart that loves Him (James 1:22).

The Jews would have no excuse on Judgment Day because they had the light of the Law. They knew what God expected. As Jesus said, "To whom much is given, much is required."

Objection: "But what about the Gentiles? They didn't have the Law. Will they be able to claim ignorance as an excuse when they stand before God?" No. Why not?

B. The Gentiles had the light of Conscience (14-15).

Vv 14-15 are actually a parenthesis, a separate thought (see NIV). The Gentiles may not have the Law, but they "do by nature the things contained in the Law." Listen to the NASB rendering, "Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law."

Did you ever notice how even people who have never read the Bible, who have no church background, have an inner sense of what is right and wrong? Travel around the world, study various cultures, and you'll find the same: people who have a sense of sin, who fear a future day of judgment, and who try to appease gods by religious activity.

How is it that people who have never heard the Word of God have an instinctive knowledge of right and wrong? The answer is in v 15. They have a "conscience." Look at v 15, "Who show the work of the law written in their hearts..."

Objection: "Here's what bugs me about Christianity. What about the innocent native in Zaire who has never God's Word? Doesn't he have an excuse?" Allow me to respond with two questions. One, is he really innocent? No, all have sinned (Rom 3:23). And two, is he really ignorant? No. Why not?

He may not have the Law, but Paul says he does possess three witnesses that point out his need for God: his heart, his conscience, and his thoughts (15). Notice what is true of the Gentiles in v 15:

1. The work of the Law is written in their hearts.
2. Their conscience bears witness.

3. Their thoughts accuse and excuse.

The Gentile may not have the Law of God, but his heart, conscience, and thoughts all scream aloud, "Something's not right in my life. I need righteousness!"

As someone has said, "There is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of every man." Every person has a conscience, an innate sense of what is right and wrong. True, it can be suppressed, perverted, and darkened, yet it's there. It accuses, and it makes excuses.

So the Gentile has no excuse. His conscience serves as an internal Law. He knows something is missing, yet he too refuses to turn from his self-sufficiency to the true God who offers salvation. Heb 9:14 says he needs to trust the Lord Jesus Christ so that the blood of Christ might cleanse his conscience.

Here's the second shocking truth. There will be no excuses on Judgment Day. The bottom line is this. No man is has an excuse (1:20). The Jew's problems is that he has violated the Law. The Gentile's problem is that he has violated his conscience.

In v 17 we discover a third shocking truth.

III. There will be no exchanges on Judgment Day (16).

The phone rings. It's your foreman. He says, "Hey Bob, I need you to work overtime tomorrow night. Can you take the shift?" You say, "Sure," and hang up. Then you realize you had a previous commitment. No problem. You call up your workmate Jim, and do a little bargaining, "Hey Jim, I need your help. I made a promise to the boss, but I need to get out of it. Can we trade shifts?" He says sure, and the exchange is made.

When it comes to the Judgment Day, there will be no exchanges. There will be no wheeling-dealing, no "no-shows." Every person has a divine appointment.

Why will there be no exchanges? For two reasons...

A. Reason #1: Because of Who the Judge is

V 16 "In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel." Who is the Judge? God will judge "by Jesus Christ." Jesus Christ is the Judge. He is the author of judgment. He is the standard of judgment.

Stuart Briscoe is right when he comments (63-64), "Anyone who has a picture of Christ which does not include Him as Judge of the earth is laboring under a serious misapprehension of the true identity of the Savior. The babe in the manger, the healer of the sick, the One who welcomed the children, the teacher of parables, the silent prisoner in the judgment hall, the pitiful victim on the Via Dolorosa, the agonizing sacrifice on the cross, the resplendent Lord in the garden, the triumphant leader in the Upper Room--all are pictures of a Lord that, in one form or another, appeal to something in the human heart. But Jesus as Judge is foreign to many."

Friend, one day we will all stand before Jesus. Acts 17:31 says, "For He has set a day when He will judge the world with justice by the man He has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising Him from the dead." I may live a good life, even better than most. That won't matter in that day. The question will be, "What did I do with Jesus Christ?" Compared to Him, my righteousness is like a foul-smelling garment. His righteousness could have been mine. Did I accept it or reject it?

There will be no exchanges because of Who the Judge will be.

B. Reason #2: Because of what will be judged

What will Jesus judge? "the secrets of men" The LB paraphrase is graphic, "The day will surely come when at God's command Jesus Christ will judge the secret lives of everyone, there inmost thoughts and motives."

John 2:25 says of Jesus, "He knew what was in man." When He saw Nicodemus, He saw a religious man with an empty heart. When He saw the Samaritan woman at the well, He knew the truth about her immorality. When Judas thought he had covered up his wicked scheme, Jesus knew.

Jesus knows. He knows the real us. He knows our secrets. And at the judgment, He will judge those secrets. Not just deeds, but motives too (see I Cor 4:5). He knows that though out of the "kindness" of your heart you mowed your neighbor's lawn, at the same time you coveted his boat in your heart. He knows that while you flattered your boss with words of praise so you could get the raise, in your heart you were cursing him. He knows our secrets. And He will judge them.

This is shocking news. The Day of reckoning is coming. There will be no exceptions on Judgment Day. There will be no excuses on Judgment Day. And there will be no exchanges on Judgment Day.

Response: "Well, I'm a Christian, so how does this apply to my life?"

Conclusion: Three lessons to learn...

1. The greater the privilege, the greater the responsibility.

The Jews had the Law. They were a privileged people. So are we. We have God's Word. We have the Resident Teacher, the Holy Spirit. What are we doing with these privileges?

Let me offer some practical questions. How often do you read your Bible? Daily? When you do spend time in God's Word, what is your aim? To learn truth so you can impress people with your Bible knowledge, or to have your life changed? Why did you come to church today--because of routine, or to grow in your relationship with Jesus Christ? The greater the privilege, the greater the responsibility.

2. We'll never appreciate the good news until we grasp the bad news.

The gospel is good news, even great news! But that will never sink if we loose sight of the bad news. We are sinners. We deserve hell. We were lost. We were blinded by our self-righteous attempts to reach God. The good news is that God reached down and picked us up. Have you responded to the good news?

3. It's possible to have false assurance about the Judgment Day.

The Jews did. They needed to be shocked into reality. That's what Paul did in Romans 2. He pulled the rug out from under their false assurance, so they would turn to Christ for true assurance. Will you be standing on solid ground at the judgment?