



HICKORY GROVE

BAPTIST CHURCH

The Human Condition

May 19, 2019

Romans 2:11-16

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¹¹ For God shows no partiality. 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. ¹³ For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified. ¹⁴ For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. ¹⁵ They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them ¹⁶ on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.

(Pastor prays)

My line of work allows for many happy and satisfying moments. Yesterday I attended a wedding between two godly young leaders at Hickory Grove. The ceremony was led by one of our great young pastors. The music and worship were led by our worship leader and a young lady who is an inspiring leader. And there were two seminarians and a church planner in attendance. It was a soul-satisfying experience to see God's grace and kindness at work on such a beautiful Saturday afternoon.

Other times ministry isn't as satisfying. It can be soul-draining. I may be in the ER, or ICU room or graveside or, worse, walking with a victim of abuse or a broken family or a hurt child. All of these situations come from the common human condition. They are a result of The Fall, and I think that's what Paul is laying bare before us, the human condition.

Since verse 11 tells us that God shows no partiality, that although we may be radically different in multiple ways, we are all equally sinners and we all equally need grace. This passage is dealing with the law and sin and judgment, and nobody gets a free pass. He uses the categories of Jew and Gentile to be inclusive of all people. In these few verses Paul is undercutting the

religious person who might be counting on all the good deeds he has done and the nice things he has said. And he's confronting the clear-eyed moral person who doesn't go to church or really practice a religion. And he's saying that all people— Jew and Gentile, black and white, rich and poor— that if any of us would ever be declared righteous by an absolutely righteous God, then you would have to be perfect in and out. And since none of us is perfect, none of us can escape God's righteousness and impartial judgment; therefore, all of us need the sin-free life and debt-paying death of Jesus. He's telling us about God's judgment for a reason.

The Holy Judgment of God Leads Us to the Merciful Cross of Christ

I'm going to make a case using 3 negatives and 2 positives.

Religion can't save you

I think that's Paul's broad point in verses 12 - 13. Whether you are Jew, Gentile, Muslim, Zoroastrian, or a Scientologist, or some brand of Christian, it doesn't matter. Notice the two times he uses the phrase "*all have sinned.*" Let's read it. Verse 12 says, *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.* Those who sin without the law, the Bible says, will perish without the law. And there are those who don't know the Ten Commandments or The Lord's Prayer or have never been to church, maybe on a deserted island and never heard the Gospel. Let's say you lived on a deserted island and worshipped the sun and the moon and the stars. You still would know right from wrong because you have done wrong. You will be judged by the things you *do* know. Let's say you make your own religion and create standards for yourself. People violate the very standards they create for themselves all the time.

Every society ever discovered has evidence of God's moral law, and in every society that law has been broken. We know right from wrong but continue to do wrong. We can't even keep our own standards, much less God's.

Then in the second half of the verse, Paul turns to the religious people, the Jews. And all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law. Here we are concerned not by what we do or do not know. We are condemned by what we *do* with what we know. That's what verse 13 says. It's not those who have all the knowledge; it's those who show evidence of grace and in verses 12 - 13, Paul puts everyone in the same category of need. All who have sinned, regardless of their culture, need the Gospel.

The Gospel is that our holy God is the creator of the whole universe and everything in it. He created man in His own perfect image, but when man sinned it created a chasm between God and man and condemned man to death because the penalty for sin is death. Jesus Christ, the son of God, was born of a virgin and lived a perfect life. He willingly gave His life on the cross to cover our sins and provide redemption for man. The Bible says in Romans 10:9, *if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*

Religion can't save you, only Jesus can save you.

Conscience can't guide you

Without Christ and the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, our conscience can get us in trouble. Verse 14 gives us a positive possibility. ¹⁴*For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law.*

So when someone who is not a believer does good, it's evidence of God's common grace, that we are all made in His image and know right from wrong and even without being a Christian can be very moral.

There are really nice unsaved people. But at the end of verse 15 we see the danger of following a conscience that is not governed by the cross. ¹⁵*They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them* ¹⁶*on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.* Their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them. Without the sanctifying power of Christ, the conscience can be a very dangerous thing. We have the remarkable ability to rationalize almost anything. The Bible speaks plenty about our conscience. 1 Timothy 1:5 – Good Conscience. 1 Corinthians 8:12 - A weak conscience. John 8:39 – Convicting conscience. Titus 1:15 – Defiled conscience. According to 1 Timothy 4:2, you can even have a seared conscience. But if our conscience isn't crucified with Christ, then it can't be trusted. Conscience can't be your guide. Christ must be your guide, and conscience becomes a servant to His lordship. Religion can't save you; only Jesus saves you. Conscience can't guide you; Jesus must guide you. Now here is the third negative.

Niceness won't cover you

Niceness. I think that's part of what Paul is getting at in verse 16. Let's read the whole thing and then just look at the central part of it. ¹⁶*on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.* God will judge the secrets of men. That seems like a terrifying verse. I think especially in the South where our manners often hide contempt. You can be polite and still be hateful.

Does it scare you that God's judgment will include the hidden things in our lives? 1 Corinthians 4:5 says, ⁵*Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God.* I don't mean little actions like checking your browser history, although some of you may need to do that. I think Paul's point here is more subtle and nuanced. I think he speaks of the heart of doing right things with wrong motives, and it's not doing you a bit of good. I think Paul here is talking about the heart.

Scripture tells us repeatedly that God knows the heart. Samuel was looking to appoint a King and brought out Eliab, who looked so regal. 1 Samuel 16:7b says, *For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.* The psalmist says to God in Psalm 139:1, *Oh Lord you have searched me and know me.* Jesus said to the Pharisees in Luke 16:15, *you are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your heart. For what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God.*

It's the heart, the motive, the will, the inmost desire. It's more than manners or niceness and self-control. It's a yielding of your deepest passions to the lordship of Jesus. It's Paul saying, I've been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me. Religion can't save you. Conscience can't guide you. Niceness won't cover you; you need the righteousness of Christ. Those are the three negative things of judgment. Let me end as the text does with two positives.

The Gospel of Jesus is the answer to God's judgment

Let's read verse 16 again and see how judgment and gospel go together. ¹⁶*on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.* God's judgment is an integral part of the Gospel and we cheapen the Gospel if we don't include the judgment of God. J. R. Stott said, "The good news of Salvation shines brightly when it is seen against the dark background of judgment." Furthermore, we cheapen the Gospel if we represent it only as a deliverance from unhappiness, fear, guilt and other felt needs, instead of seeing the Gospel as

a rescue from the coming wrath of God. That is what the “prosperity gospel” does. Isn't that what Paul meant when he wrote to the church at Thessalonica and 1 Thessalonians 1:10, *we wait for his son from heaven whom he raised from the dead, Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come.*

You see, until the law of God and judgment of God has done its work of exposing or condemning sin, we are not ready to hear the Gospel of justification by faith in Jesus. Don't be encouraged in who you are; be encouraged by what Christ has done to save you. Guilty feelings awakened by wrongdoing are healthy; they impel us to seek forgiveness in Christ. This will be my last and most positive point.

Our judge is our Savior

Let's read verse 16 again. ¹⁶*on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.* It is a significant comfort to know that our judge is none other than our savior, that when I walk into God's courtroom, I have a friend there who is closer than a brother. In fact Paul says it like this in 1 Timothy 2:5 – 6, ⁵*For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,* ⁶*who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.*

Black and white, religious, atheist, Catholic, or Baptist, the holy judgment of God presses us to the merciful cross of Christ. Jesus died in the place of sin and sinners, taking judgment and now offering grace, a saving grace that sustains.

As a reminder of God's grace, we will celebrate The Lord's Supper today.

(Pastor prays)