

We heard Paul say last week that “*there is no partiality with God*” (2:11) in His judgment of humanity. He is fair when He charges that humanity is “*all under sin*” (3:9) and “*all have sinned*” (3:23). The apostle now anticipates an objection to God’s fairness in judgment: don’t the Jews have an unfair advantage since God gave them His Law, and aren’t the non-Jews at a disadvantage since they weren’t given God’s Law? How could they know what God demanded, and how can they be judged according to a standard of which they were ignorant? Is God really fair and how is that possible?

God’s Law, Judgment, and Fairness (2:12)

Non-Jews and Judgment (2:12a)

2:12a *For all who have sinned without the Law will also perish without the Law...*

- God is righteous. He will not prosecute sin that has not been previously defined in His Law:
 - “...where there is no law, there also is no violation” (4:15).
 - “...sin is not imputed when there is no law” (5:13).
- Does this mean that the non-Jews (who did not have the Law as contained in the O.T. Scriptures) will not be judged by God? They didn’t have the Law, after all. This is the question Paul is addressing.
- “Perish” (ἀπολοῦνται) is parallel with other descriptions of judgment in the previous verses: “...wrath and indignation...tribulation and distress” (2:8,9). While the Greek word literally means “destroyed,” it is also translated “perishing” and “lost.”
 - This word is used in a **present tense** in places to describe unbelievers – **they are being destroyed under God’s judgment even as they live and breathe in this world** (1 Corinthians 1:18; 2 Corinthians 2:15; 4:3; 2 Thessalonians 2:10). Jesus uses this word in parables, too, to describe the judgment of unbelievers (Matthew 21:41; 22:7; Mark 12:9).

- Jesus warns His disciples, in the face of persecution, to never forget the true danger: “*Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him Who is able to **destroy** [ἀπολέσαι] both soul and body in hell*” (Matthew 10:28).
- Consider Jude’s warning: “...*I desire to remind you...that the Lord, after saving a people out of the land of Egypt, subsequently **destroyed** [ἀπόλεσεν] those who did not believe*” (Jude 5; see also Hebrews 3:12-4:2).¹ These are those who seem for a while to be believers, but ultimately they leave the Church for the world and show that they never truly had saving faith.²
- Some try to understand “*perish*,” or “destroyed,” to mean that souls are annihilated in the judgment – there is, they argue, no eternal suffering in hell. “*The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to come up out of the abyss and go to **destruction** [ἀπόλειαν]...the beast which was and is not, is himself also an eighth and is one of the seven, and he goes to **destruction** [ἀπόλειαν]*” (Revelation 17:8,11). The “beast” is “*thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone...and...will be tormented day and night forever and ever*” (20:10). “*Destruction*” means unending torment in “*the lake of fire*,” not being consuming and annihilated by the fire.

¹ For other references to O.T. judgment using this word, see Luke 17:27,29; 1 Corinthians 10:9,10; Jude 11.

² These are the ones described in Matthew 13:20-22; Mark 4:16-19; Luke 8:13,14; Hebrews 6:4-6; 1 John 2:19.

- Where is salvation to be found? “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that **whoever believes in Him shall not perish** [ἀπόληται], but have eternal life...My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and **they will never perish** [ἀπόλωνται]; and no one will snatch them out of My hand” (John 3:16; 10:27,28). Jesus is not speaking of the end of this earthly life with this promise – the “perishing” is the eternal punishment in hell for unbelievers.³

Jews and Judgment (2:12b)

2:12b...and all who have sinned under the Law will be judged by the Law...

- The Jews, “under the Law,” will be judged guilty of violating God’s Law.⁴

God’s Law, Revelation, and Fairness (2:13-15)

Jews and the Law Read Aloud (2:13)

2:13...for it is not the hearers of the Law who are just before God, but the doers of the Law will be justified.

Justification

- This is the first of fourteen times the incredibly important verb “justified” is used in Paul’s letter to the Romans.
- Here’s how Baptists have confessed justification over the last 372 years:

³ Repentance, as part of true belief, is also key to escaping this “perishing” eternal judgment: “...unless you repent, you will all likewise **perish** [ἀπολεισθε]” (Luke 13:3,5).

⁴ Paul describes Jews as being “under the Law” in 1 Corinthians 9:20, as well.

- “Those whom God effectually calleth, he also freely justifieth, not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins, and by accounting and accepting their persons as righteous; not for anything wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ’s sake alone...by imputing Christ’s active obedience unto the whole law, and passive obedience in his death for their whole and sole righteousness by faith, which faith they have not of themselves; it is the gift of God” (1689 Baptist Confession, 11.1).
- “Q. 37. What is justification? A. Justification is an act of God’s free grace, wherein He pardons all our sins, and accepts us as righteous in His sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone” (Benjamin Keach’s Baptist Catechism, 1689).⁵

Another “Gospel Trap”

- Remember that last week we saw Paul set a “Gospel trap” (revealing our false belief that we can save ourselves). He told us God “will render...to those who by perseverance in **doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal**

⁵ Newer than the 1689 Confession is our contemporary Confession: “Justification is God’s gracious and full acquittal upon principles of His righteousness of all sinners who repent and believe in Christ. Justification brings the believer unto a relationship of peace and favor with God” (Baptist Faith & Message 2000, IV.B). I’ve been thinking – some believers argue over the end-times or politics or whatever your pet doctrine is, but fewer and fewer Christians can explain justification by faith alone in Jesus Christ (and this is Paul’s primary concern in Romans, Galatians, and Philippians 3!!). Maybe the N.T.’s concern should be ours. Eternity is at stake!

life...glory and honor and peace to everyone who does good” (2:6,7,10). He will tell us, though, in 3:12 that “there is none who does good, not even one” (quoting from Psalm 14:3//53:3). It is only those who are in Christ who are capable of doing good works – because it is God doing the good works in believers (Ephesians 2:8-10; 2 Thessalonians 2:16,17; Hebrews 13:20,21).

- Now we see another “Gospel trap.” Those who do the Law, Paul now says, “*will be justified.*” Can anyone do the Law, though? With one exception, the answer is “No.”
 - “...by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight” (Romans 3:20).
 - “...a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified” (Galatians 2:16).
- Why is it impossible to be justified by the Law?
Because a single violation of God’s Law – just once – makes you a transgressor of the Law and a sinner. **READ Deuteronomy 27:26; Galatians 3:10; James 2:10,11.**
- There is One Who was justified by the works of the Law done in human flesh. Calling it a “confession” concerning “*the mystery of godliness,*” Paul later gives us a hymn which speaks of the one Man Who was justified by the works of the Law:
*“He Who was revealed in the flesh,
Was vindicated [ἐδικαιώθη, or “justified”] in the Spirit” (1 Timothy 3:16).*
It is by faith-union with the Justified One that we ourselves are justified before God.

Non-Jews and the Law on the Heart (2:14,15)

2:14 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, 2:15 in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them...

- This is not the same writing of the Law on the heart that is the first promise of the new covenant in Jesus Christ.⁶ The new covenant writing of the Law on the heart is part of God’s reconciliation with us – we desire to obey Him from our hearts because of the work of the Holy Spirit in us.⁷ Here Paul describes **the Source of the human conscience** – it is God revealing in human beings His Law.
- When humans write laws which reflect God’s Law, they are witnessing against themselves that they know God’s Law (see 1:32) and yet cannot keep it.

The Image of God

- “...God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule’” (Genesis 1:26). While theologians have endlessly speculated on what the “*image of God*” is in man, we fortunately do not have to rely on the creativity of man to find an answer – it’s in the text itself. God’s “*image*” and “*likeness*” is summed up in the proclamation “*let them rule.*” God, the King over all, created us to show forth His sovereignty by manifesting His rule. “*The work of the Law written in their hearts*”

⁶ READ Jeremiah 31:31-34 (it is a promise claimed in the cup of the Lord’s Supper, which “*is the new covenant in [Christ’s] blood*” (Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 11:25).

⁷ God promises a new heart His people which will desire to obey Him (Deuteronomy 30:6; Jeremiah 32:39; Ezekiel 11:19,20; 36:26,27). Genuine relationship with God includes obedience to Him (John 14:15; 15:10; 1 John 2:3,4; 5:3; Revelation 12:17; 14:12).

(Romans 1:15) is the reality of God’s image as King and Law-giver stamped on the human being. To try to make our own rules or to live by our own authority results in an existential crisis of self-understanding in humanity, resulting in the sinful, chaotic, and broken world in which we live.

We Cannot Escape from General Revelation

- God speaks in two ways:
 - In special revelation, God speaks to us in the Bible (this revelation is required for knowledge of salvation).
 - In general, or natural, revelation, God reveals Himself through all that has been made.⁸
- We read about general revelation in the previous chapter of Romans: “...since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made” (Romans 1:20). “What has been made” includes us as human beings. Our bodies, souls, and consciences reveal God’s attributes.⁹

The Gospel and the Day of Judgment (2:16)

2:16...on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus.

⁸ This two-fold description of revelation shown in Scripture itself. Psalm 19:1-6 describes general revelation. Psalm 19:7-11 describes special revelation.

⁹ Unbelievers are troubled and conflicted to the core of their being because they are trying to silence this witness of God within them: “...the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron” (1 Timothy 4:1,2). Another way of saying this is that unbelievers “suppress the truth in unrighteousness” (Romans 1:18).

The Day

- The apostle Paul constantly speaks of the coming “day” of judgment for all humanity.¹⁰

My Gospel

- Paul has previously referred to the Gospel as “the gospel of God” (1:1) and “the gospel of His Son” (1:9). Here it is “my gospel” (he also calls it this in 16:25; 2 Timothy 2:8). This doesn’t mean Paul invented it – it was, after all, “promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures” (1:2) long before Paul was born. This doesn’t mean Paul had the authority to change it – he tells the churches of Galatia that “even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed!” (Galatians 1:8,9).
- The Gospel is Paul’s entire life. It is his everything. Can you say this about the biblical Gospel?

Jesus the Standard of Judgment

- It is the “secrets of men,” not just outward behavior, that will be judged of God. This is what Jesus teaches us (Matthew 5:17-48). It is in the human heart that outward sin originates (Matthew 15:18,19// Mark 7:21//Luke 6:45). By this standard all humanity is guilty of violating God’s Law.
- Jesus, the One Who lived in perfect righteousness, holiness, and obedience to the Law, is the standard for God’s judgment.¹¹

¹⁰ Romans 2:5; 13:12; 1 Corinthians 1:8; 3:13; 5:5; 2 Corinthians 1:14; Ephesians 4:30; Philippians 1:6,10; 2:16; 1 Thessalonians 5:2,4; 2 Thessalonians 1:10; 2:2; 2 Timothy 1:12,18; 4:8).

¹¹ Jesus as Judge is a recurrent theme in the N.T. (Matthew 16:27; John 5:22-27; Acts 10:42; 17:31; 2 Corinthians 5:10; 2 Timothy 4:1,8).