

The Impartial Judge Part 2

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[0 : 00] Open your Bibles up to Romans chapter 2.

We have been in the book of Romans now for a couple of months, and we finally arrived at the middle of chapter 2. And Romans, of course, is one of those books that most preachers want to preach through, but are scared to preach through.

Because it is so profound, and the Gospel is laid out in so much detail in this book that you want to preach it, and yet you feel a great weight and a responsibility to get it right and to help God's people to understand it rightly that many times we can hold off on it.

And so I prayed about it and decided that we needed to go through Romans because we need to have a clear, deepening understanding of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

And so as we read this morning, we're going to read beginning in verse 11 where we finished last week. We're going to read verse 11 again this week and read down through verse 16. So I want you guys to stand with me in honor of God's Word as we read together.

[1 : 15] The Apostle Paul writes, For God shows no partiality. 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 it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law will be justified.

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. 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 on that day when, according to my Gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.

Father, we need Your Spirit who inspired Paul to write these words to come now and help us not only to understand them, but help our hearts to be changed by them and to help us to rejoice in the truth that we see here.

We ask these things in and through Christ. Amen. You guys take a seat. This week has been one of those weeks where there's a lot happening in the news.

[2 : 41] I mean, a lot of things going on. I know some of you don't pay attention to the news, don't keep up with the news, but I love to read. I read a lot and I read a lot of the news and then occasionally I will actually watch the news, but mostly I read things.

And it's been a frustrating week for someone who likes to keep up with the news, for someone who likes to know what's going on, who likes to be able to form opinions. One of the things that, to me, can be frustrating in today's day and age with these 24-hour news networks and the news is always on and there's always news stories coming in day after day is one of the things is that you're pushed to form an opinion really quickly on things because everybody on the TV has an opinion and everybody that you read online already has an opinion fully formed on the events that are taking place and I feel sometimes rushed like I don't know all the facts.

I don't know everything that's happening here. And then that becomes even more frustrating when you have terrible events happen like what happened in Missouri this week and you have conflicting accounts of what happened.

You have one group of people saying they saw this, another group saying that this is what happened and it's oftentimes difficult to discern the reality of what happened there.

Even the Bible recognizes the need when somebody is charged with a crime for more than one witness. Over and over in the Old Testament and even a few times in the New Testament we're told that there needs to be at least two witnesses to confirm that something happened.

[4 : 14] But of course we know that even when you have multiple witnesses, sometimes those witnesses contradict each other. Sometimes they play off against each other and sometimes you have completely irreconcilable accounts of the same event or group of events.

And that can be very frustrating at times when you just want to know the truth. You just want to know what happened because you want to be able to talk about things in a way that's accurate and true and right.

You want to be able to pray for people in the right sorts of ways and yet we have these conflicting narratives that are out there. Which is why I am so thankful that we get to week after week return to God's Word when we gather together.

Because the Word of God tells us the truth. It doesn't mince words. It doesn't mix things up. It doesn't point us in very different directions. The Word of God points us in the right direction.

It tells us the truth as it really is. So that even when we have days and weeks and months and sometimes even seasons of life in which everything around us is confusing and we can't discern the truth of the events that are happening around us and we don't know who to trust and who to believe, we can know that we have a sure, firm, reliable testimony of God to the truth.

[5 : 34] After all, the Apostle Peter says that this written revelation of God did not come about by any prophet's own interpretation or their own imagination, but that God Himself, the Spirit of God Himself, carried those men along who wrote these words down and inspired every word that we have now preserved for us these centuries later in this book that we call the Bible.

And I really enjoy, as I read through the Bible, I probably enjoy no other writer of Scripture more than the Apostle Paul. Because the Apostle Paul thinks systematically oftentimes and he writes in sort of a linear, straight line kind of way.

He thinks logically. He makes a statement and then he defends that statement and then he gives reasons for that statement, oftentimes drawing upon the Old Testament to prove his point and it just follows a straight line.

He argues beautifully for the things that the Spirit inspires him to argue for and to say. And we have seen that now as we have covered a chapter and a half of the book of Romans. That it follows.

One thing follows after the other in a logical fashion. And the Apostle Paul is building an argument throughout this book, especially throughout the first few chapters. He is building an argument about the way in which we get right with God.

[6 : 55] About the way in which on Judgment Day we can stand before God and survive the judgment. We can stand before God and hear the Judge of all the universe say, this man or this woman is in my sight and judged to be in my courtroom righteous.

Or on the other hand, this man or this woman stands in my courtroom guilty of the crimes with which they are charged. Paul is showing us how to get the first verdict rather than the second verdict.

And really from verse 18 of chapter 1 onwards he's been advancing this first part of his argument in which he says that everybody stands naturally guilty on that day.

Everybody is a sinner. Everyone is fallen. Everyone has committed sin and no one has a claim on their own to their own righteousness that they can hold up before God on that day.

So that from verse 18 of chapter 1 to the end of chapter 1 verse 32 he argues for the sinfulness of all of humanity. Everybody. Every nation. Every ethnic group.

[8 : 04] Every people group. Everybody stands in the category of unrighteous or ungodly. And then he turns his sights in chapter 2 toward the Jewish people in particular.

Who if anyone might have a claim throughout history to be able to be exempt from the judgment of God certainly would be those who we call the chosen people of God. Certainly it would be those who are descended from Abraham who was plucked out from among the nations to be God's own.

And Paul begins in chapter 2 to show us why even for the Jew they stand guilty before God before God on judgment day.

And in fact verse 11 the verse that we begin with this morning is really the central verse of chapter 2 that there is with God no partiality.

God does not show partiality to anyone. in fact that word partiality is one that you don't find anywhere outside of the New Testament.

[9 : 05] It's an interesting word because it doesn't exist. The New Testament was written in Greek in the ancient world and it's not a word that exists in the Greek world as far as we know outside of the New Testament.

The Apostle James uses it in his letter and Paul uses it a handful of times in his letter but it seems to be a word that was specifically invented by the writers of the New Testament or at least invented by the apostles very early on in the life of the church to help describe what God himself is like.

God is impartial. It literally means that God does not regard a person's face. He doesn't take faith is what the word literally means.

In other words God doesn't make a determination or judgment about someone based upon any outward physical characteristics in that person. Anything from their background or from their lineage.

None of those things count before God. He doesn't take into account faiths, appearances, outward things. So then it doesn't really matter what race you're from or what your ethnic background is.

[10 : 08] It doesn't really matter what social or economic class you belong to. None of those things count before God on judgment day. He is a just judge and with Him there is no partiality there is no favoritism showed towards one group over another.

And it began to really drive that point home and really prove that point in the verses that we looked at last week where the Apostle Paul tells us that God's judgment is based not upon any of those outward characteristics, not upon any of those inherited characteristics, but God's judgment is based upon our works.

He looks at what we actually do and He judges everyone by the same standard. Take a look back up at verse 6 where Paul says that God will render to each one, to every person, according to His works.

Jesus, no other criteria by which His just judgment will be rendered except by what we have actually done.

Not what our names are, not who our families are, not what we look like, not how much money we have, not how much we've accomplished in terms of gaining a reputation for ourselves in the world.

[11 : 27] None of those things will count on the day that Paul calls the day of God's righteous judgment. None of those things will count. But He will judge us fairly, impartially, according to what we have done.

But of course, the Apostle Paul anticipates an objection to that statement. Because you might say, that makes sense. If God's going to be an impartial judge, then He ought to judge everybody by the same standard, and so He ought to judge us by what we've actually done.

But at the end of the day, that proves to be a partial judgment, an unfair judgment, because after all, did God not give the law of Moses to the people of Israel?

I'm pretty sure that people in Babylon didn't get the law of Moses. People in Egypt didn't get the law of Moses. The Irish up there didn't get the law of Moses. Whoever was living in Ireland at that time, the Celts didn't get the law of Moses, right?

Nobody got the law of Moses. People living in southern Africa didn't get the law of Moses. The Israelites alone received the law of Moses. So if God's going to judge people by what they do, and only one group of people actually have God's requirements, God's law, doesn't that people group automatically have an advantage over everyone else in the judgment?

[12 : 48] How can you say, Paul, that the judgment comes first for the Jew and also for the Greek or the non-Jew? How can you say that it's equal for both groups of humanity when only one group received the law, when only one group received your moral standards?

How can that be fair? Paul is anticipating that exact objection in this passage that we are looking at. Now, we wouldn't phrase it that day that way.

I think if we were writing the book of Romans today, if someone were writing it today, we wouldn't phrase it in terms of the law of Moses or Jewishness or any of those sorts of things. We would probably say things like, but God, don't those people who were raised in Christian families or church-going households, don't they have an advantage over people down the street who were never taken to church as a child, never taught the Ten Commandments, never learned any of those sorts of things?

Isn't there some sort of advantage there? I mean, if you're going to judge this guy over here by the same standard as this guy, and this guy actually knew the rules that he was supposed to be playing by, doesn't this guy have an advantage over the other guy?

That's not fair. That's how we would think. And people do talk like that. People do think that way. People assume that those who've perhaps never heard the Gospel or never been exposed to Scripture or Christianity in some sort of way will be given a free pass on Judgment Day because they don't know the standards and how can they be expected to live by the standards?

[14 : 16] I think that's maybe how we would say it today. But for the Apostle Paul, the mindset and the thinking is primarily in terms of the two classes of humanity, Jewish and non-Jewish, which he often calls Greek or Gentile here in the book of Romans.

So he's going to answer that. And I want us to pay close attention to his answer to this because I think that it has great application to how we think about the Gospel and how we think about talking to our neighbors when we go to share the Gospel with them.

So look in verse 12. Here's what he says. He's already said God does not show partiality and now he's going to continue to defend that statement. He begins with the word for. In other words, here's an explanation, here's a reason, here's further proof that God doesn't show partiality.

Four, all who have sinned without the law. So there's that category of people who did not receive the law of Moses. Or today, that's that group of people who were never taught the Ten Commandments, never taught the Bible stories.

That's that particular group of people. They are without the law. For those who sinned without the law will also, he says, perish without the law. That way perish means to be destroyed.

[15 : 26] That's the same judgment mentioned up in verse 5. God's wrath revealed upon people. Paul says those who sin without the law will face a judgment that is equal to what they know.

Those who sin without the law will perish, will face judgment, will face destruction and wrath without the law apart from the law. And then he says, and all who have sinned under the law or literally in the law will be judged by or through the law.

So there is a difference here. Judgment comes upon both groups of people, but there is a distinction. Those who do not have God's law will be judged not according to the specifics, the details of the law of Moses.

And those who do have the law will be judged through or by the law. And then here's here's the statement that I think we all need to hear and understand.

So applicable. Verse 13. For or because it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified.

[16 : 42] In other words, what Paul is saying is mere possession of the law of God, mere knowledge of God's standards, does not count for anything before God on judgment day.

It will not help you to be able to spout off the Ten Commandments. It will not help you to be able to say all of the things that you learned in Sunday school as a child. It would not help the Jew on judgment day to be able to quote from the Torah and tell God all about God's law.

Paul says it's not the hearers of the law. It's not those who know the law. It's those who do the law who will be counted as righteous before God. The doers of the law only, he says, will be justified.

And we need to think about this word justified because it's a key word throughout Romans, especially in the first four chapters of Romans. It's going to occur several more times in chapters three and four, but this is the first time in Romans that we encounter the word justify or justified.

This is the first time. Now, it's built on the same root as words like righteous or just or righteousness. So we have seen related terms scattered throughout chapter one and even in chapter two.

[17 : 52] But this is the first time we're really coming across the word justified. So I want us to pause just for a minute before we follow Paul's argument the rest of the way through. And I want us to talk about what that word specifically means, because I think this is important in shaping our understanding of how people obtain a right standing before God.

The word justified means to be declared righteous by someone. In this instance, to be declared or pronounced righteous by God on judgment day.

That's that's what it means. The word justified does not mean that you are made righteous. And this is a crucial, crucial distinction here. Justified to be justified by God does not mean that God is at that moment making you into a righteous and holy person.

That is not what it means. To be justified means to be counted as if you are righteous, to be declared righteous. And that really is the only meaning that will fit in this verse.

That's the only meaning that makes sense in this context. Listen to what he says. He says that the doers of the law will be justified. If justified means we'll be made righteous, it's essentially as if Paul is saying those who are righteous will be made righteous.

[19 : 09] The doers of the law will be justified. That doesn't make sense. Instead, what Paul is saying is that those who actually are righteous, those who actually do the law will be pronounced as righteous, will be declared by God, the judge, as being righteous.

That's the point that he's making. Everything hinges upon whether or not you can stand before God and be declared by Him to be righteous. Everything.

Because if you don't receive that declaration, then you receive the declaration of guilty, worthy of condemnation, eternity in hell. There are no other options. That's it. You're either righteous before God, counted as righteous by Him, and you receive eternal life, or you are reckoned as guilty and sinful by Him, and the result is eternal punishment.

There are no other options. And so Paul says here, God is not partial, because God does not regard a person as righteous or declare them to be righteous merely because they possess the law.

Rather, a person must actually do the law. They must actually obey the law in its entirety, fully and completely, in order to receive that verdict. But there's more in his argument.

[20 : 27] He goes on, and he says in verse 14, for when the Gentiles, who do not have the law, we've already established that, they don't have the law. They don't know the law of Moses.

For when the 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.

This is just a very practical observation that the Apostle Paul is making here. All right? He says that people who don't have the law, oftentimes, just naturally, by nature, do what the law requires.

So the law of Moses says, you shall not murder. And the vast majority of people living upon the planet today have never committed murder.

It just never happens. Okay? We have plenty of murderers in society, but most likely, all right, thank goodness, your next door neighbor, it's probably not a murderer.

[21 : 27] It's possible, but probably not. Most of the people that you work with or go to school with, not murderers. They're just not. They never killed anybody. They don't plan on killing anybody. And chances are, they'll die someday, never having murdered anybody.

Paul says, many times, those who do not have the law by nature do what the law requires. I have known honest people, get this, honest people who don't believe in Jesus.

What in the world is going on there? I mean, what's with honest people in the world who don't actually live by this book or pay attention to this book or maybe have never even heard all the commands of this book and yet they're not, generally speaking, some people are not prone to lie.

They're not liars. You can trust what they say. Paul says, we observe that all the time around us. Paul was a man well-traveled all over the Roman Empire.

He saw all sorts of pagan religions and terrible things that people do and offerings made to these false gods, but he also observed that some of those who were as lost as could be have no clue about who the true God is, aside from what's revealed in nature, have no real understanding of God's law, had never heard of the law of Moses.

[22 : 50] That's a little bit strange in our society. We don't run across a lot of people who've never heard of the Ten Commandments. But in Paul today, remember, though the Jews are scattered out among the Roman Empire, still you don't have a religion that has spread among all these different ethnicities.

If you're a Jew, then you're a Jew. If you have God's law, then you're Jewish and you have His law. If you're not Jewish, most likely you haven't been exposed to His law, most likely. And so Paul observes all of these people throughout the empire that he's traveled, and he sees that they're pagan, he sees that they worship false gods, but he also sees that some of them are honest businessmen.

He was, after all, a tent maker, which means he would have had to buy and sell goods to Gentiles all the time. And he knows that some of them can be trusted and others cannot. He knows that they're trustworthy businessmen.

He knows that most of the people he encounters on a daily basis have never killed anyone. Most of them have never stolen anything. He recognizes that. He sees that. And he says, the Gentiles sometimes by nature do what the law requires.

And then he explains how this can be. He says in verse 15, when they do that, when they act in such that kind of way, they show that the work of the law is written on their hearts.

[24 : 10] And there's the key. There's the clue to understanding. How can it be if God judges impartially according to what we do, how can it be that God would judge someone who does not have the law by what they do and someone who has the law by what they do and that be impartial?

The answer is, in a sense, all have the law. To a certain degree, every human being who has ever lived on the planet has access to the law of God.

Now, that doesn't mean they have access to all of the law of Moses. Of course not. Many of the laws that you find throughout the Torah in Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy, many of those laws are very specific to Israel.

They have to do with the way that Israel will function and punish criminals within their nation. They have to do with the way that the temple structure runs and the priesthood is to act and all those sorts of things. And that would have no bearing upon anyone in any other part of the world, anybody who's from any other line or race or ethnicity, would have no bearing upon them.

So much of the law of Moses is unknown. But what we today would often call the moral law, that sort of center, which is really summarized for us in the Ten Commandments, that moral center of the law of Moses is engraved upon the hearts of every human being who has ever lived.

[25 : 29] It's called being created in the image of God. And even though we are fallen, even though we are depraved, despite that, still the basic requirement, moral requirements of God's law are written onto our hearts.

And as a result of that, Paul says here in the rest of verse 15, that their conscience bears witness and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them.

There are two truths at play here. Number one, the law of God is written on the hearts of all. Number two, because the law of God is written on their hearts and they are sinners, that law of God often accuses them and causes their conscience to be pricked many times.

So that people who have no access to God's written revelation sometimes feel guilty for violating the commands in His written revelation.

Why? Because it's written not only here, but on their hearts. And because we're all fallen and sinful, we violate the law written upon our hearts over and over and over.

[26 : 43] And Paul says those who do not have the law, that is, have no access to the written law, the Torah, those who do not have the Torah will nevertheless be judged by the law that they do have that part of the Torah written on their hearts.

So God's judgment after all in the end is impartial. And this matters. This is important because this is a point of contact that you have even with the most lost person you will ever encounter in the world.

This is a point of contact that we have with them. We've already seen in Romans chapter one, for those of you who were here, others can go back online and listen to sermons from Romans chapter one. But we've already seen in Romans chapter one that all people everywhere have access to the basic knowledge that God exists, to basic things about who God is and his nature that God makes known.

He's actively revealing to us through the creation. So there's one point of connection that we have with people, even people who've never heard of Jesus, never heard of the gospel, never been in church, never had any exposure to Christianity or the things of God.

We can have a point of contact with them because we know no matter what they might worship, no matter what their creed might be, at the end of the day, we know implanted within them and revealed to them in the creation is a basic knowledge of God.

[28 : 01] And now on top of that, we have another point of connection with lost people, and that is that the law of God, the basic moral requirements of God are written upon their hearts.

And that becomes a point of contact because you cannot proclaim the gospel to someone, you cannot tell them the good news unless you first reveal to them the bad news that they need good news.

You have to first tell them that they're sinful. You have to first tell them there's a just God who will judge them for their sins. There can be no gospel apart from that. In fact, take a look at what Paul says down in verse 16.

He refers to judgment day as that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus. Judgment here is tied to the gospel.

How can that be? How can judgment day, how can the day of God's wrath have anything to do with something called gospel or good news? What is the connection there? How can you tie those things together?

[29 : 05] Because for the apostle Paul, you don't have good news bad news apart from bad news. You don't have the gospel apart from the truth about who we really are and what God really requires of us.

There is no proclaiming salvation in Christ unless you tell a person that they need to be saved from something. It makes no sense otherwise. And so we have this point of connection to say to those who even have no access to God's written word, to be able to say to them, you know in your heart, your conscience accuses you.

You have violated basic moral standards. Sometimes people refer to this as natural law. That is law present everywhere. Law that is natural to everyone. And we can say to someone, you know deep down, God exists.

There is a creator and he is worthy of all honor and worship and glory. And you know deep down that you have violated his standards and you have not honored him and glorified him in the way that he deserves.

And suddenly you have opened the way to the good news of Jesus Christ. That though we are all sinners, though we all have violated God's law, be it written in a book, on a piece of paper or in our hearts, we have violated it.

[30 : 34] And though that is true and though God is just and will judge us all, and though we can only be right in God's sight, if he declares us to be right, there is a way.

To be declared and pronounced righteous by God, to be justified by God, apart from works. And that is to have the one man, the only man, who fully obeyed the law, that is to have his righteousness counted as ours and our sins counted against him.

And that is what the Gospel is all about. The Gospel is all about us receiving a righteousness that is not ours. Sinful people, on judgment day, because they believed in Jesus, having God look at us and say, you are righteous.

We know we are not. We know we are sinners. We know we have violated God's law. And yet, by faith in Jesus, we can also know that on that day, He will pronounce us to be righteous because the righteousness of another is counted in our place and He takes our sins upon Himself.

That is the Gospel. That is what we are called to believe. It is the only way to eternal life and salvation. And it is the message that we are charged with taking to the world around us.

[31 : 59] You want to effectively take this message to your neighbors, and your co-workers, and your lost family members. You want to find a way to be able to connect with them.

Know this, that there are basic moral requirements graven on their hearts that you can connect to. And you can begin to turn their eyes toward the need for a Savior.

The Gospel is good news through and through. Everything about the Gospel is good because the Gospel takes care of everything bad in us and everything bad that we have done.

So I want to encourage you and I want to even plead with you. Don't trust in anything other than the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Don't trust in any other message. Don't trust in any other man. Trust only in this Gospel. Do not trust in a message that says, if you will simply do X, Y, and Z, if you will obey this list of rules, you will be okay with God.

[33 : 14] Do not trust the Gospel or a message that says, if you will be a good person, God will accept you on Judgment Day. Do not trust a message like that. Do not trust a message that promises you health and wealth and prosperity in this world and in this life.

Because that's not the promise of the Gospel. Faith is not to obtain in this life our hopes and dreams.

And the Gospel has nothing to do with the American dream. The Gospel is simple. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

In Him and Him alone. And trust in Him only and not yourself. But Him alone. And you will be justified by God.

It's good news through and through. And it's good news that your neighbor needs to hear. And your co-worker needs to hear. And you need to look for and pray about and find points of contact so that this message can be made known to them.

[34 : 22] Let's pray.