

GOD'S METHOD OF JUDGMENT - II

Romans 2:6-16

Bob Bonner

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After Jane landed at La Guardia Airport, she immediately called her old college roommate to arrange a drive to New York City for a quick visit to catch up on one another's lives. Mary hadn't seen Jane in ten years and couldn't wait to see her, even if it meant driving an hour each way to the city. Mary called her husband at work to tell him what she was up to and to invite him to join them after work, but he said, "No, I'm tired. I'll just fix myself a quick bite to eat and go to bed early."

Mary and Jane spent the whole day and part of the evening together talking about old times, their husbands, and their careers. Saying good bye was going to be hard. Mary picked up her purse from the hotel dresser and Jane walked her to the elevator to say good bye. Suddenly Mary, rifling through her purse, realized that she didn't have her car keys. "Oh no!" she thought. She had done it again! She had locked herself out of the car, and the hide-a-key probably hadn't been replaced after the last time she had locked herself out.

Not wanting her to go to the parking garage alone, Jane accompanied her to the car to see if, by any chance, she left a door unlocked or the hide-a-key was there. Sure enough, the car was tightly secured and there was no hide-a-key.

Mary dreaded what she had to do. Her husband was probably asleep by now and would be in no mood to drive into the city at this late hour to pick her up. Furthermore, a light snow had begun to fall.

After putting down the phone, Jane could see by her facial expression that Mary's husband probably was not pleased with the opportunity for a late evening drive. But that wasn't the half of it. The horrified look on Mary's face was compounded a few minutes later by the discovery of a set of car keys on the floor, just next to the dresser in the hotel room where her purse had been sitting. Quickly, she dialed home to see if she could catch her husband before he left to tell him she had found her keys, but he was already gone.

Boy, was he going to be mad now! What a way for her best friend to meet her husband. She was so embarrassed by the whole thing. Jane tried to console her, but for forty minutes, Mary couldn't stop crying. And then all of a sudden, Mary stopped crying, and a big grin came across her face. She looked at Jane and said, "Come on!" Without a word of explanation, they both took off for the parking garage. Mary took her keys, unlocked the car door, put the keys in the ignition, and then locked the doors. Looking at Jane, Mary said, "Now he'll only know the half of it!"

Although I don't know Mary or Jane, I have heard some pretty funny stories from some of you over the years about mistakes that you have made, as well as some ingenious cover-ups you have pulled off to protect yourself from being totally exposed. Your secrets are still safe with me. (For a price! 😊)

A reason we can laugh at stories like this is that all of us know that it's more natural for us to attempt to keep our sin, our mistakes, and our errors quiet, than to be vulnerable before others. Additionally, we quickly forget our past foibles. That's one reason we find it so easy to become critical of others when their mistakes are exposed, all the while going on living as though we had not done something equally as foolish or worse. Let's admit it, our self-criticisms are not quite as true and unbiased as, say, God's critique of each of us. He knows everything about us, and nothing escapes His notice.

The Apostle Paul knew this about God and us, and that is why he spent the time he did uncovering and reminding us of the truth in the first two and a half chapters of **Romans**. His purpose in exposing us for who we are is to help us see our need for forgiveness, acceptance, and approval through Jesus Christ, for, as He will prove, there is nothing we can do on our own to earn God's forgiveness so that He is obligated to accept us.

If you have your Bibles with you, please open them to **Romans 2** as we carry on with our study of **verses 1-11**, examining God's method of judgment.

For any who may be guests with us this morning, allow me to set the context for our study of **Romans 2**. We find ourselves in the middle of a major section of the book. This section begins at **1:18** and ends at **3:20**.

In this major section, Paul spells out the problem of all of humanity. In **Romans 1:18-23**, Paul begins with an indictment against every human being who has ever lived. He correctly declares that all of us are guilty of ignoring God or suppressing the truth about God, truth that God has made evident to all of us.

Then, with **1:24-3:20**, Paul lays out the case against all humanity for having suppressed the truth about God and for having exchanged the truth about God for a lie. When Paul is finished, he will rest his case that, indeed, all of us do stand guilty before God, condemned to experience His eternal wrath.

Thank goodness, his case against humanity does not end there. Beginning with **3:21**, Paul explains for all humanity to see God's only way of escape from God's wrath and judgment through Jesus Christ. We will start looking at that good news in weeks to come.

But for now, we find ourselves in this major section where Paul, the prosecuting attorney, step by step lays out his case against us. In **Romans 1:24-3:20**, Paul speaks to four groups of people that pretty much cover all sorts. The first is the Hedonist (**1:24-32**), those individuals who live for their own pleasure, which most often is immoral in nature. As a result of the hedonist's godless approach to life, chaos reigns in society. Next, in the section we return to this morning, Paul addresses the Self-righteous moralist (**2:1-11**). This is followed by the Enlightened pagan (**2:12-16**) who may never have heard about God's Laws or Jesus Christ. The fourth class of people is the Religionist (**2:17-3:8**). Paul concludes this section in **3:9-20** with the thought that all people, apart from those who have put their trust in Jesus Christ, stand condemned before God. On our own, no person will be able to stand before God to make a successful argument for God's obligatory acceptance of us based on our own merit.

My approach to **verses 1-11** is to look at God's standards by which He judges humanity. As I see the passage, there are at least six standards by which God will render His judgment of us. Last time, we touched on four of them. Let's reread those verses, note the four standards we have already uncovered, and continue from there.

Paul writes:

¹Therefore you have no excuse, every one of you who passes judgment, for in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. ²And we know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things. ³But do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment on those who practice such things and do the same yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God? ⁴Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance? ⁵But 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, ⁶who will render to each person according to his deeds: ⁷to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; ⁸but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation. ⁹There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek, ¹⁰but glory and honor and peace to

everyone who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

¹¹For there is no partiality with God.

First, in **verses 1-2**, we learned that because God is all-knowing, only He has all of the facts. There is nothing to prohibit Him from knowing every detail about our life, choices, and actions. Therefore, He is the only one who can accurately judge us, because he does so according to the truth. We, on the other hand, can be deceived, either self-deceived or otherwise, and we lack true discernment of what is true about us. Hence, our judgment is not always true.

Second, in **verse 3**, we noted that God’s judgment is always fair. In other words, God won’t let some people slide from misdeeds, but then judge others for the same thing. When we do in secret the same things others do, God sees, and thus we should not expect that we will escape His judgment. To let any of us slide would not be fair.

Third, in **verse 4** we discovered that because God is “**kind**,” “**long suffering**,” and “**patient**,” He is sometimes seen as not caring about sin or injustice. But when He is longsuffering and kind and patient, people may mistakenly conclude that God is being suddenly rash when judgment occurs. But that is not the case. His judgment is timely, not a day early or late.

Further, we learned that God, being longsuffering, doesn’t always judge immediately, because He is kind and patient. He is this way because He hopes this will lead some to repent, to turn away from rejecting God, to admit their wrong doing, and to put their trust in Christ, allowing them to escape the wrath and judgment of God. God does not desire for any to perish.

Finally, from **verse 5** we concluded that some mistakenly figure that if God doesn’t do anything immediately about our wrong doing, He will simply forget about our sin and the judgement of it. That will not be the case. According to **verse 5**, God’s judgment is sure to come.

I was reminded of this as I read the news a couple weeks ago about OJ Simpson’s release from prison this coming October. From what I can discern, and in the absence of any other information to the contrary, I don’t

think OJ knows Jesus as his Savior. I suspect that because he is getting out on parole, he might think he has escaped the due sentence against him for other crimes he committed, even the possible murder of his wife. He may be figuring, like others before him, that somehow time takes care of everything and heals all wounds, and there is no need for repentance.

But our God of justice will be sure to rectify all wrong doing in the final courtroom drama in heaven, when all the secrets of those people's hearts who have rejected Jesus Christ will be revealed.

That brings us to our present place in our study, **Romans 2:6**. Beginning with **verse 6** and finishing with **verse 10**, Paul gives us God's next standard of judgment. He states the standard in **verse 6** and then goes on to explain it in the following verses. We read that God "**Will render to each person according to his deeds.**" Simply put, God judges according to our deeds.

If you notice in some of your Bibles, these words are written in a different font. That's an indicator to English readers that these words are partial quotes from the Old Testament. Paul is explaining to his readers that the basis of this standard of judgment is not something new. It was something God declared some 2,000 years ago in the Old Testament Law. Paul's reason for quoting the Old Testament Law is to set the record straight for all humanity, whether Jew or Greek (meaning all non-Jewish people), that God's standard for perfect righteousness has never changed. The basis upon which people will either enjoy eternal life with God and be at peace with Him or face God's eternal indignation and separation from Him is founded upon their deeds.

It is very important, at this point, for us to be reminded of the overall context of this major section of Scripture, **1:18-3:20**. Throughout it, Paul is presenting his case that no one, apart from putting their complete trust in Jesus Christ and His finished work on the cross, can expect to be forgiven for their sins, accepted and approved of by God, so that we can live at peace with God, without fear of ever being rejected by Him.

Hence, Paul's purpose in writing **verses 6-10** is not to teach us that someone can legitimately get saved by their own good works. It is quite the opposite, as we will see.

In **verse 10**, Paul mentions “**peace.**” This is a reference to no longer being at war with God, which is the result of being rejected by God for our suppression of the truth or our rebellion against Him. Paul clearly teaches later that we can’t find “**peace with God**” through our own efforts to appease Him. Peace with God only comes through Christ, as Paul later writes in **Romans 5:1**, “**Therefore, having been justified by faith**, [meaning declared righteous and acceptable by faith] **we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.**” It is one’s complete faith or putting one’s complete confidence in the work of Christ on the cross for salvation, and that alone, that brings peace between you and God, rather than an ongoing spiritual war, indignation and wrath.

Keeping Paul’s big picture in mind, that the human race is helpless to find peace with God based on their own efforts, let’s look more closely at **verses 7-10**.

In **verses 7-10**, Paul lays out what the Old Testament Law promised in principle for the outcome of a person’s life. The Law pointed to two possible outcomes, and both are mentioned in **verses 7-8**. “**⁷To those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life;**” and then, “**⁸but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation.**”

One of the keys to correctly interpreting this passage is to not miss Paul’s emphasis on the words “**by perseverance**” and “**are** (ongoingly or persistently) **selfishly ambitious.**” Paul is stressing that if a person has chosen either one of these paths as the direction for his life, and lived up to them without fail, there would be a specific outcome. If one persistently sought to ignore God, there will be wrath and indignation. If one without fail never sinned against God and sought to do good, there will be eternal life.

The question is: “Is it possible that for one’s entire life one could consistently, without fail, seek to do good?” We would like to hope so, wouldn’t we? But Paul’s whole argument is based on just the opposite. He knows that all of us have failed many times at seeking after good alone. We all have been selfishly motivated and thus done evil.

Just to give you a brief preview of Paul's closing argument against the human race's predicament before God, look at what he writes about the convicting evidence against the human race. In quoting from the psalmist David, known as "the man after God's own heart," he honestly portrays the human race. We read in **3:10-12**, "**As it is written, 'There is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands; there is none who seeks for God; all have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good, there is not even one.'**"

Is there any question as to Paul's conclusion about the possibility of people successfully seeking after God? No. Hence, Paul is not writing these words in **2:7-10** to suggest that any one has or can actually accomplish this feat of truly seeking after God. Instead, he is simply stating that after the Fall of the human race, there are only two possibilities of focusing one's life, and each one has its predicted outcome.

Allow me to repeat myself by stating Paul's point in other terms. It is Paul's objective in presenting his case against humanity to lay out his doctrine of the universal powerlessness of people, who live under sin, to earn God's acceptance.

In the end, **verses 6-10** simply explain that God will judge people according to their deeds. If they have persistently lived life with no failure in doing good, then they would have eternal life. If they fail just once to seek after good, then they would receive for their deeds God's wrath and indignation.

In **verse 11**, Paul states the final guideline that governs God's judgment. He says, "**For there is no partiality with God.**" God's judgment is always impartial. In other words, there are no favorites with God. As the apostle saw the world, there were only two major classes of people--Jews and non-Jews or Greeks. Just as God has offered the gift of salvation to the Jew first and then the Greek, so God, without partiality, brings the same priority to judgment, to the Jew first and then the Greek. In other words, it doesn't matter to God if you are a Jew or a Greek, an American or an African, a Westerner or Easterner. It doesn't matter to Him if you were raised in a Muslim home or a Christian home. God deals with every individual on the same equal opportunity basis.

In **verses 12-16**, Paul turns to a third class of people who make up humanity. As we look at this group, we will also learn of another guideline by which God judges all people. In this section Paul will answer the question, “Will God send to hell those people who have never heard of Jesus Christ or the Jewish law or this letter to the Romans?” As we look for God’s answer to this question, we are going to read one verse at a time and comment as we go.

Before we do, allow me to quickly define a word for those of you who may be new to reading the Bible. The words “**just**” and “**justified**” are words used several times in these verses, and they must be understood if one is going to grasp the meaning and implications of this passage. These terms come from the legal field. They mean to be declared okay, acceptable, and righteous.

With that, let’s begin, 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.**” Let’s just stop there for a moment. Paul has just pointed to two different classes of people: first, those who have never seen or heard of the Law, and second, those who have (Jews or Gentiles like Cornelius, the Roman Centurion mentioned in **Acts 10**, who eventually meets Jesus). Hence, I am calling this third group of people, those who have never heard of God’s Law or Jesus Christ, the enlightened pagan.

When I use this description of the third class of people, the enlightened pagan, some immediately think of the naked savages that live out in the jungles of the economic third world countries. They seldom think of the savages who live in the concrete jungles of our major American cities (ghettos or high rises) or the rural areas of Wolf Creek, where there is a whole new generation of people growing up with no idea what the Bible says, let alone any idea who Jesus is. But these individuals fall into this same class of people.

Let’s continue. ¹³“**For it is not the hearers of the Law who are just before God, but the doers of the Law that will be justified.**” The Jews and informed non-Jews who know about God’s Law or Jesus are not declared righteous based on their knowledge. Only those who do the Law without fail are declared acceptable to God.

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 other

words, those folks who live in Selma, or attend Grants Pass High School and have never had any religious training, but have their own moral law, some of which has instinctively come to them from God, are “**a law to themselves**” and will be held accountable to their own moral standard.

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.**”

What’s a conscience? It is an innate moral sense that approves or disapproves of ones’ personal actions and thoughts. [*So That’s What it Means*, by Don Campbell, Wendell Johnston, John Walvoord and John Witmer, Nashville, Tennessee, Thomas Nelson, Inc. 2004, p.59]

Hence, your conscience is something that gives you a basic sense of moral insight. In **2 Corinthians 4:2**, we read this about the conscience: “**But we have renounced the things hidden because of shame, not walking in craftiness or adulterating the Word of God, but by the manifestation of truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God.**” Among other things, this verse teaches us that every human being, at one time, had a moral conscience given to them by God.

When we disregard our consciences, our consciences accuse us and we immediately feel guilt or shame. If we don’t respond and do what is right according to our conscience, the Bible says that we can “**sear**” (**1 Timothy 4:2**) or “**corrupt**” (**Titus 1:15**) our consciences, making them no longer reliable or sensitive to when we or others are doing wrong. Seared or deadened consciences are what allow a society or government to drift away from God.

Depending upon how the enlightened pagan lives his/her life, Paul goes on to tell us, that ¹⁶“**On the day** (meaning the day of judgment) **when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus.**”

Right here, Paul answers a question I have been asked many times over the past forty-nine years: “How will God judge those who have never had a Bible or never have had the opportunity to hear about Christ?”

The answer is very simple: God will not judge them based on a written code they have never had access to. God will not judge them based upon their never responding to the Gospel that they have never heard. Instead, God will judge the enlightened pagan according to that person's own moral standard. If they are condemned, it won't be because they fail a standard they have never heard of, but because they have failed to keep their own enlightened moral code.

This raises the question: "Will any be saved on this basis?" Paul answers that for us in **verses 12-14**.

For all who have sinned without the Law [written Old Testament Law or standard] 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 [declared to be in a right standing] 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.

In short, Paul's answer is that no, the enlightened pagan will not be saved on the basis of living up to their own moral code, because they will fail to do so. "**Are a law to themselves**" is an expression equivalent to saying, that they will be judged on the basis of their own moral code. And because they have failed to live up to their own moral code, their conscience will bear witness against them. And thus they will perish, regardless of whether or not they have ever heard of Christ or the Law. They will be judged as unacceptable before a holy God, based on their failure to keep their own moral code.

Furthermore, Paul tacks on in verse 16, **“On the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus.”** Paul is saying that a day is coming when all who are not in Christ will be judged for even those secrets, those private hidden violations, of their own standards or God’s standards that they thought nobody would ever know about.

Up to this point, Paul’s message has been obvious. There is no hope of enjoying eternal life with God based on your own ability to prove yourself acceptable before God, apart from Jesus Christ, whether you are a hedonist, a self-righteous moralist, or an enlightened pagan. Apart from Christ, you have no hope of breaking lifelong habits or addictions, being set free to live as God would have you live now, or enjoying the deep personal relationship today that God intends for us without Christ. But with Jesus comes forgiveness, life, power and a deep personal sense of God’s involvement in your life.

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son, that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have everlasting life!” John 3:16