

Intro:

In chapter 2 of Romans we have been considering judgement — God’s coming impartial judgement of all men in the great day when he judges all sin.

- We began with Paul showing the moral man that he condemns himself and cannot hope to escape – he ought not to presume on the present mercies of God.
- We continued with a fearsome description of the basis and consequences of judgement – the focus is on God’s wrath poured out against sin in the final judgement.
- We are in the midst of an emphasis on the impartiality of God in that judgement: it has been stated for us in two ways in v. 11 and v. 12.

Now we are going to be looking at a more thorough explanation of the impartiality of that judgement, especially as it touches the lives of those who think themselves religious.

There is a great potential for confusion in the practice of religion. Those who practice religion think their very practices are *good works* which at least *balance* out their bad works, but probably *exceed* their bad works.

In other words, the moral man and the religious man suffer from the same problem: they look at life as if God is keeping score in some elaborate system of credits and debits, like a spiritual bank account.

- Most men will acknowledge that there are at least *some* debits to their account. Sins: things God disapproves of, which deserve punishment. The record of these are accumulated in one’s spiritual account as negative deposits against one’s record.
- Moral men and Religious men seem to think, however, that regardless of their debits, they also have an opportunity to make some headway against their sins. They are in the business of depositing credits to their account so that they can hopefully at least balance things out.
 - Attend church occasionally (some credits for that, surely)
 - Attend church weekly (big-time credits for that)
 - Participate in a religious ritual (baptism, prayers, lighting candles, etc. — mucho big-time credits for that)
 - Bible reading
 - Social and societal good works (helping one’s neighbour, being faithful to one’s spouse, raising ‘good’ kids, giving to charity, etc., etc. = this equals many, many credits)

So here we are in Romans 2. Paul is confronting both the moral man and the religious man here. The means of confrontation is the impartial judgement of God.

The moral man and the religious man are together stammering away: “But, but, but... Look at my morality! Look at my religion! Doesn’t that count for something?”

That’s where we are. We are going to answer that question today with this sermon:

Having the Law is not Enough

Read Rm 2.12-16, text 13-15

Proposition: The possession and even performance of some aspects of God’s will does not make you righteous in God’s eyes.

I. The implication of God’s impartiality is judgement not reward (6-12)

- A. The principle is that God rewards deeds (6)
- B. The alternatives are explained with an emphasis on judgement (7-10)
- C. The principle of impartiality is stated (11)
- D. The principle of impartiality is elaborated (12)
 - 1. The possibility of reward for righteousness remains (but is not mentioned)
 - 2. The fact of destruction for those who sin outside the law is parallel to the judgement by the law of those who sin within the law – God’s judgement is equal and impartial
 - 3. The positive possibility is ignored because it is a practical impossibility: all men have sinned, therefore the focus is on judgement

Occasionally in junior high school our teacher would have to leave the room for some reason or other. We were left to our own devices, but we were supposed to be performing some task.

I remember on one occasion we as a class were particularly unhappy with this one particular teacher, so our class went on strike. We all agreed we wouldn’t cooperate or do any work for this teacher.

- I wasn't a ringleader in this rebellion
- But I was influenced by peer pressure (and our universal dislike of this particular teacher)
- So we all were on strike, to one degree or another – some had worse behaviour than others, but we were all in on it.

The whole thing was eventually resolved (it involved a severe talking to by the Vice-Principal among other things). But my point is this: we were all guilty.

- Some were not as bad as others
- So while in theory we could have been rewarded for good behaviour, we were all guilty of bad behaviour

That's where we are in Rm 2.12: the focus is on judgement because good behaviour is only a theory.

II. The privilege of having, knowing, and studying the Law does not overcome the requirement of performance (13)

A. Our passage is answering an objection: “for”

1. Notice in our passage our string of “for’s” as we explained last time
 - a. Verse 11 gives the reason God is going to apply his judgement equally to the Jew and to the Greek
 - b. Verse 12 explains or expands on God’s impartial judgement
 - c. Verse 13 is giving a reason why the Law is going to judge the one who sins under the law
 - d. And verse 14-15 is going to give a reason for the reason in v. 13
2. The objection is this: “Wait a minute, what if I am a hearer of the Law, doesn't that count for something?”

This is where so many moral and religious people are today

- “Wait a minute, what if I *do* thus and so...”
- “Wait a minute, what if I *belong* to this particular church...”

- “Wait a minute, what if I *have a deep theological education*... [put in your own level of religious training in for ‘deep theological education’]”

Do you see yourself at all in these kinds of objections?

B. Our passage answers the objection, “Doesn’t ‘x’ count for something?”
— Answer: “No!”

1. The issue is ‘who is just’ or ‘who is justified’

- a. To be ‘just’ or ‘justified’ means to be able to stand under the thorough impartial examination of the judgement
- b. All the evidence is examined:
 - 1) This one is declared right – nothing wanting, or...
 - 2) This one is declared unjust, not meeting the standard, guilty, sentenced, condemned, destroyed...

2. Hearing the Law is not enough

- a. This is particularly a Jewish objection (a religious objection)
- b. Possession of the Law is considered a great privilege, marking the Jew out as exceptional among men
- c. The word ‘hearing’ means more than merely listening to the Law read in the synagogue

“[The one’s hearing] ἀκροατὰι tends to mean ‘pupils,’ constant hearers, who are educated in the law: see verse 18. But no degree of familiarity with the law avails if it is not done.”¹

d. Consider an example: Jas 1.22-24

“We have a reminder in James 1.22-24 of the ease with which the Jew could hear the law read and go away without any effect on his life and conduct.”²

What about your familiarity with religion? If you have sat in this church for a number of years, you have had a thorough Biblical education.

¹ James Denney, “St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans” in *The Expositor’s Greek Testament*, W. Robertson Nicoll, ed., p. 597.

² Everett F. Harrison, “Romans” in *Expositor’s*, vol. 10, p. 30.

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Your 'hearing' these things means "diddly" in the judgement.

3. Doing the Law is essential

a. Two quotations:

"Merely possessing the law will not be sufficient for them in the day of judgment. The issue will be whether they have kept it."³

"The law can justify only when it is obeyed; reading it, hearing it taught and preached, studying it — none of these, nor all of them together, can justify."⁴

b. One passage: Jas 2.8-13

1) Did you catch v. 10? He who is guilty in one point is guilty of all

2) Did you catch the impartiality of v. 13?

4. The answer to the objection in Rm 2.13

a. Objection: "Wait a minute, what if I am a hearer of the Law, doesn't that count for something?"

b. Answer: "No, hearing doesn't count for diddly..."

³ Herman A. Hoyt, *The First Christian Theology*, p. 44.

⁴ Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 147.

III. The evidence of universal acquaintance with the Law seals the fate of those intimately acquainted with the Law (14-15)

A. Paul is going to pile on a reason on top of a reason here

1. Rm 2.13 explains why those who sin under the Law are judged equally with those sinners the Gentiles
2. Rm 2.14-15 proves why mere hearing of the law is not enough (Summary: because the Jews aren't the only one's who have heard.)

B. The state of the Gentiles (14)

1. First of all, this doesn't have to be true of every Gentile for the statement to be true: no article in Gk, means generically, "When anyone who is a Gentile..." [But it is generally true of all men...]
2. It is quite clear that the Gentiles do not have the Law
 - a. They didn't receive it by revelation from God as the Jews did
 - b. They didn't sit in meeting places and listen to it, study it, observe it, as Jews did (unless they came to the meeting places of the Jews)
3. But it is also undeniable that the Gentiles do the deeds of the Law by nature (or 'instinctively' NAS)
 - a. That is, deeds of the moral law, not ceremonial law
 - b. That is, not all the law, but they understand murder is wrong, they honour parents, etc.
4. The consequence is that Gentiles are 'a law to themselves'
 - a. That is, not lawless
 - b. But by natural revelation they do deeds which show they have a rudimentary understanding and possession of the Law:
 - 1) They have a natural law which become The Law to them
 - 2) They are a Law (note capital) to themselves

C. The spiritual condition of the Gentiles (15)

1. They by their morality demonstrate the work of the Law (note capital) *in their hearts* ... NOTE THAT PHRASE

- a. There is an internal, spiritual, natural understanding of the work of THE LAW
 - b. That is not to say they have THE LAW in its specific code, but in innate, or natural, understanding
2. This is seen in the operation of conscience in sinning Gentiles hearts
- a. Their conscience accuses them “I shouldn’t have done that”
 - b. Or their conscience excuses them “I’m ok with that”

“So it can be maintained that the function of conscience in the Gentile is parallel to the function of the law for the Jew. The way conscience operates is described as a process of accusation or defense by the thoughts of a man, the inner life being pictured as a kind of debating forum, so that at times he finds himself exonerated at the bar of conscience, at other times convicted of wrong.”⁵

The point: The Gentiles actually have enough of the Law naturally to actually do some of its works.

- But does the Gentile’s natural possession of the rudiments of the Law (and performance of some of it) allow him to escape judgement?
- Well, NO!
- Then why should the religious man’s possession of the actual Law mean anything to justify him?

Conclusion:

And... why should your presence in this Church, hearing these sermons, studying this Bible, do anything to justify you?

Answer: it can’t.

Paul is leading us inescapably to this conclusion, but he is going to go beyond it. We have a Christ who satisfies ALL THE LAW for us, who will impute to us His Righteousness, if we will repent of our sin of self-righteousness and turn to Him.

Have you done that?

⁵ Everett F. Harrison, “Romans” in *Expositors*, vol. 10, pp. 31-32.