



## Law and Justice

### Romans 2:12-16

1. Judgment according to knowledge (verse 12)
2. Justification according to deeds (verse 13)
3. Judgment according to conscience (verses 14-15)
4. Judgment according to the gospel (verse 16)

Every society needs a rule of law. It needs a standard by which right and wrong is measured. The law is that standard.

The law states that certain behavior will not be tolerated. Causing bodily harm to another person is assault. Damaging the property of another is vandalism. Taking the property of another person is theft. Going on someone's land without permission is trespassing. Taking the life of another is murder. And when such laws are maintained, there is order in the society.

Now, of course, it's not always that easy. Disputes about the law will always come up. That's the purpose of the courts: to hear and resolve disputes based upon the law, and thereby administer justice on behalf of the wronged party.

And in any society, such resolution is far from perfect. Too many in our society get away with their crimes. How many thefts and murders go unsolved? How many crimes are left unprosecuted? How many are living life under the radar of justice?

But the pendulum can swing the other way as well. From time to time we hear of stories of those who have been accused of a crime and sent to prison for years, only to be found innocent when further evidence surfaces.

This is such a problem in the United States that an organization has been formed called, "The Innocence Project." Their mission (as stated on their website) is "to free the staggering number of innocent people who remain incarcerated, and to bring reform to the system responsible for their unjust imprisonment." [\[1\]](#) The utopia of perfect justice seems so slippery and impossible to obtain.

And indeed, in our fallen world, we will never have perfect justice. The good news this morning is this: there is no injustice with God. When God judges, he does so perfectly.

My message this morning is entitled, "Law and Judgment." It comes from Romans, chapter 2, and verses 12 through 16.

Romans 2:12-16

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 who 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.

These words are coming off of verse 11 in which Paul had just said that "God shows no partiality." That is, he judges perfectly. His judgment is far more perfect than any human court could ever be. Because, in God's omnipotence, he can discern what no other human court can discern. He can discern the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

Jeremiah 17:9-10

The heart is deceitful above all things,  
And desperately sick;  
Who can understand it?  
I, the LORD search the heart  
And test the mind,  
to give every man according to his ways,  
According to the fruit of his deeds.

And when it comes to God's judgment, he takes into account the heart and the mind. he takes into account the light we have received. God judges according to knowledge. Indeed, this is my first point.

#### 1. Judgment according to knowledge (verse 12)

Look again at verse 12, ...

Romans 2:12

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.

In other words, when God executes his judgment, he takes into account what we know. If we don't know the law, he will not judge us in our ignorance. If we have the law and know the law, he will judge us accordingly.

On a few occasions during my short life, I have been ignorant of the rules. And I have paid the price for it. For instance, this Spring, Yvonne and I went to India to train pastors and their wives. The timing of our trip was such that we were able to spend five days with Carissa in England. On one of those days, we took a little trip to Brighton, a popular vacation spot in England, along the southern coast of the country. We purchased a lunch from a local vendor and headed out to the beach to eat it.

We saw some wonderful chairs there on the beach. So, we sat down and enjoyed our meal. About time when we stood up to go, a man approached us and informed us that the chairs we were using were chairs "for hire." They actually cost 2 pounds each (like \$3). And so, he demanded that we pay him. We didn't know what he was talking about.

So, he pointed over to the sign in the far off distance that explained everything. We had not noticed that sign. We told this guy that we hadn't seen the sign. But that didn't work. He still demanded his pay. Ignorance of the law is no excuse. So, I handed over the 6 pounds that we owed him, and went away feeling cheated. I didn't know that eating in those chairs would cost us \$10! If I had known that, we would have found some other place to sit and enjoy our lunch.

On another occasion, the stakes were higher. A few summers ago, our family was in California on vacation. We were driving down I-5, and I was at the wheel. I saw a bunch of "Speed Limit 70" signs. And that's right where I was, about 70 miles per hour.

Unfortunately, I didn't happen to notice the signs that read, "Autos with Trailers/Trucks 55 Maximum." And we were traveling with our "Little Guy" teardrop trailer. And I didn't realize that the "55 Maximum" applied to me. So, I was stopped by the police. And though I was ignorant of the law, it was no excuse. I still broke the law. I still had to pay the consequences. Some \$450 worth of consequences. It wasn't a pleasant experience. And now, when we are in California, we comment often on these signs.

I went away from the whole thing feeling cheated. If I had known that the speed limit was only 55mph since I was towing a trailer, I would have been going 55! I have certainly done this since then when pulling a trailer.

But in our country (and around the world), it's pretty simple: ignorance of the law is no excuse. In God's economy, however, such is not the case. God's judgment is such that he knows what you know. And he knows what you don't know. And he will judge you on what you do know. And not on what you don't know.

If you didn't know that those seats cost 2 pounds each, you won't be held responsible for the 2 pounds. If you didn't know that the speed limit was 55mph (and not 70), you won't have to pay the \$450 ticket. In other words, nobody will leave the throne of God feeling cheated. Because God's law and God's justice is perfect.

God is the perfect judge. He knows when you are lying. He knows when you are telling the truth. He knows what you did. He knows what you didn't do. He is correct in all of his assessments. Look again at verse 12, ...

Romans 2:12

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.

In this verse we encounter two groups of people. First are those who are "without the law." Second are those who are "under the law."

The first group contains those who don't have the Bible. Paul is talking about those nations and societies that haven't been reached with the gospel. He's talking about those who are living in a godless society. Pagans, who have no knowledge of the law of God.

The second group contains those who have the Bible. Specifically, Paul is talking about the Jews who had the Old Testament, and knew the Old Testament, and loved the Old Testament, and sought to live under its direction.

We can easily apply this to Christians today who have the Bible, who know the Bible, and who seek to live by the Bible. And notice how God will deal with each of these groups of people differently. Those without the law will also perish without the law. Those living "under the law," will be judged by the law. This is what I mean when I say ...

## 1. Judgment according to knowledge (verse 12)

God will take what you know, and will use that against you in the judgment. And notice here what exactly will take place with the first group. They will perish. That is, they will be judged. They will be condemned.

Now, this often causes concern for people. People think about those who have never heard about Jesus Christ. They have never heard the gospel. They have never heard that he came to bear our sins upon the cross. They have never heard that we are required to believe in him

for forgiveness of sins. And with no human opportunity for salvation, they think that it would be incredibly unfair for God to judge them. They think that it would be unfair for God to send them to hell.

But that's, indeed, what Paul is saying here. He says ...

Romans 2:12

... all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, ...

And if you have any doubt regarding God's justice in the matter, may I remind you of Paul's argument in Romans, chapter 1. In the creation, God has revealed himself to all of humanity. Every human being alive knows God (Romans 1:21). Every human knows of God's eternal power (Romans 1:20). Every human knows of God's divine nature (Romans 1:20). And, every human being alive has rebelled against that knowledge, refusing to honor the Lord or give thanks to him (Romans 1:21).

And God will be completely just for condemning them. And notice here how God will judge. He will judge "without the law." That is, he isn't going to pull out the Ten Commandments as a rule and standard by which to judge those who have never heard of the Ten Commandments. No, he is going to condemn them based upon what they know and how they have rejected him.

Paul is going to come back to this again in chapter 5. Look over there in verse 12.

Romans 5:12-14

Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.

These verses talk about Adam's sin and its effects upon all of us. Particularly, Paul is talking here about those who lived before there were even a thing called, "The Ten Commandments."

Remember, God gave the law to Moses (in 1440 B. C.). But, Adam lived quite some time before that. Abraham lived about 600 years before Moses. Noah lived some 400 years before that. Adam lived a few thousand years before that.

And yet, during all of that time, death was in the world. Death was even upon those who had never received the law of God. And what was the consequence? Death to all. God judged them "without the law." And they faced the effects of Adam's sin: death.

So, get it in your mind that God's ways are just. And those who have never heard of the gospel will justly perish. And if you don't embrace that fact, then you will not understand the gospel. You may miss the urgency of telling others about the gospel, because you think that a state of ignorance might just be better for them. It's not. Apart from hearing the gospel, all are lost.

It's why we must go. It's why we must speak. It's why we must tell others of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Let's move on to the second group. That is, those who have the law. Look again at verse 12, ...

Romans 2:12

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.

Notice again, how God takes into account what you know. And if you know the law, God will judge you by the law. If you know the Ten Commandments, God will judge you by the Ten Commandments. If you know the Proverbs, God will judge you by the Proverbs. If you know of the demands of Jesus, God will judge you by the demands of Jesus. If you know the epistles of Paul, God will judge you by the epistles of Paul.

Whatever light you have received, God will use it in his judgment of you. This is why it was so tragic when the Jews rejected Jesus. John 1:4 tells us that "in him was life, and the life was the light of men." But John later says, "... This is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil" (John 3:19).

Rather than embracing the light, the Jews rejected him. No where is this more clear than in the judgment scene with Jesus and Pilate. Pilate said, "Which of the two do you want me to release for you? Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?" (Matthew 27:21, 17). And they shouted out, "Let him be crucified!" (Matthew 27:22). When Pilate objected, saying, "Why, what evil has he done?" ... the crowds "shouted all the more, 'Let him be crucified!'" (Matthew 27:23). And on the day of judgment, God will bring this to bear as testimony against the Jews who have rejected their Messiah.

They had the law. They should have known better. They should have seen the light. Their condemnation is just.

But before you throw stones at the Jews, realize that we stand in the same place, perhaps worse. Because we have more light. Not only do we have the Old Testament, but we have the New Testament. And we have the benefit of history to weigh and see if the claims of Jesus are really true. And as Jesus said (in Luke 12:48), "Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required." When it comes to our lives, God will look at the fruit of our lives.

This brings us to our second point. We have seen, Judgment according to knowledge (verse 12). And now we come to ...

## 2. Justification according to deeds (verse 13)

Romans 2:13

For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified.

We encountered some verses like this last week. Do you remember?

Romans 2:6-7

He will render to each one according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life;

It looks an awful lot like salvation by works. Verse 6 tells us that God will render according to works. Verse 7 says that if you are patient in well-doing, you will receive eternal life. Verse 10 promises glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good.

It looks an awful lot like salvation by works. Only here, it is a bit more blatant.

Romans 2:13

For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified.

Now, you might easily take this to mean that we are justified before God by our works. Again, I remind you that this cannot be the case. Because, Paul, himself says that this cannot be the case. Look over at chapter 3 and verse 28, ...

Romans 3:28

We hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.

We are not justified by our works! And that's Paul's consistent testimony throughout Romans: "We are justified by his grace as a gift" (Romans 3:24). "To the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness" (Romans 4:5). "Since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God" (Romans 5:1). "We have been justified by his blood" (Romans 5:9). "If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (Romans 10:9).

But doesn't 2:13 seem to say the opposite? That we are justified by our works? Remember the million dollar question? "Why does Paul say that God will render to each one according to his works, when he knows that we are saved by grace and not by works?" This week, we could easily change it to this: "Why does Paul say that the doers of the law will be justified?"

And the four options remain:

- A. He was wrong.
- B. He was mistaken.
- C. He was neo-orthodox.
- D. He was right.

And the obvious answer is "D. He was right." The key, again (and always), is the context. In the heart of chapter 2, Paul is deep in the midst of an argument that is leading to the conclusion of 3:10-12, ...

Romans 3:10-12

... "None is righteous, no, not one;  
no one understands;  
no one seeks for God.  
All have turned aside;  
together they have become worthless;  
no one does good,  
not even one."

So, the thought, even, that Paul is saying that we, by our goodness, can be justified before God is not what Paul is getting at. He's getting at something else. In verse 17, we see the prideful Jews who think that they will be accepted before God, simply because they are Jews.

Romans 2:17-18

But if you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law and boast in God and know his will and approve what is excellent, because you are instructed from the law;

He continues in verses 19-24 challenging the Jews to obey the law! Do what it says. If you are teaching others, then do what you are teaching (:21). Don't rest that you have the law—the embodiment of knowledge and truth—actually obey it! (verse 21). Or, to use Paul's

words, ...

Romans 2:13

For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified.

In other words, it's not merely hearing the law that makes you righteous before God. But, it is believing it! It is acting upon it! And it comes in that order. Faith, then works. The faith, apart from our works, makes us righteous before God (3:28). But our works are a demonstration that our faith isn't merely words.

Let's do some math. Which equation is correct? Which is true?

Faith = Salvation

or

Faith + Works = Salvation

or

Faith --> Salvation --> Works

The first equation represents "easy believism." There is something very true about that. But, it fails to deal with verses like Romans 2:13. It fails to point out the place of works in our salvation.

The second equation represents Roman Catholicism. You must have faith and works to be saved. This takes Romans 2:13 and Romans 3:28 into account. But it fails to understand priority: which comes first? It fails to understand precedence: Which is most important?

The third, Biblical Christianity, deals with the statements of Paul in Romans 2:13 and 3:28. It gives understanding to the statements. Paul's point is this: our works will justify us, because they will demonstrate the reality of our faith. This is the same thing that James gets at.

James 1:22-25

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

Let us be doers of the word.

We come now to our third point:

### **3. Judgment according to conscience (verses 14-15)**

Romans 2:14-15

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

This is really a repetition of verse 12, explaining what's going on in the minds of the Gentiles (who don't have the law). They do not have the law, but they are a law to themselves. The law is written on their hearts.

We come now to our fourth (and final) point:

### **4. Judgment according to the gospel (verse 16)**

Romans 2:16

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

This will lead us to Romans 8:1--"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on November 13, 2016 by Steve Brandon.

For more information see [www.rvbc.cc](http://www.rvbc.cc).

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[1] <http://www.innocenceproject.org/>