

The Gospel of Judgment (Romans 2:16)

Introduction: Please open your Bible to Romans 2:12-16.

There is a saying in our culture that has been popular for quite some time now: “Only God can judge me.” This saying has been printed on **t-shirts**. It has been turned into a **song** (Tupac Shakur, Lecrae). And some people have even had these words **tattooed** on their body.

But there are at least two things wrong with the saying: “Only God can judge me.”

1. First of all, it is based upon a misinterpretation of what Jesus said in **Matthew 7:1**, “Do not judge so that you will not be judged.” **Matthew 7:1** may be the most misinterpreted verse in the Bible. People wrongly think that Jesus is teaching that **you cannot judge anyone for anything for any reason**. It is a **blanket prohibition** against making any moral judgments against people. People say, “You have no right to tell me that I am wrong or you have no right to tell me what to do. Judge not lest you be judged. Only God can judge me.”

But this is an **unlivable standard**. To prove it simply ask the objector: Do you think it's wrong to commit rape? The objector would say, “Yes.” And then you could reply by saying, “But who are you to judge?” It's impossible to live without making moral judgments.

If you read **Matthew 7:1** in its **context** (which is what you should always do when reading the Bible) you will see that Jesus is not forbidding judging others. Instead, He is teaching that **you must judge yourself before you judge others**. It's not about never judging, it's about how to judge. What Jesus condemns and forbids is **prideful, self-righteous, hypocritical judgment**. Before you attempt to remove the **spec** that is in your brother's eye, first remove the **log** that is in your own eye.

And then in the very same passage Jesus actually calls certain people **hypocrites, dogs, and pigs**, which is an example of making a moral judgment against people. We are called to practice discernment which involves making moral judgments. We are called to recognize false prophets by their fruit which involves making moral judgments. We must call evil, evil, and sin, sin. We must make moral judgments about people.

I think **Paul Washer** says it best when he says...

“People tell me judge not lest ye be judged. I always tell them, twist not scripture lest ye be like Satan.”

2. A second thing that is wrong with the saying, “Only God can judge me.” is that when people make that statement **they somehow think that being judged by God will be better for them than being judged by man**. The fact that God is going to judge ought to be far more concerning than being judged by man. When people say, “Only God can judge me.” they are trying to make themselves feel better when in reality they ought to be overwhelmed with a sense of fear and trembling especially if they are living an ungodly life.

People who say, “Only God can judge me.” are woefully ignorant of what the Bible actually says about divine judgment. People who say, “Only God can judge me.” have never read **Romans**

2:16.

At this point in our study of **Romans** we are learning about the condemnation of the Jews.

I. The Gospel Introduced (1:1-17).

II. The Gospel Explained (1:18-4:25).

A. The Need For Righteousness (1:18-3:20).

1. The condemnation of Gentiles (1:18-32).

2. The condemnation of Jews (2:1-3:8).

And in this larger section on the condemnation of the Jews (2:1-3:8), the Apostle Paul begins with...

a. The principles of divine judgment (2:1-16).

In this part of the chapter Paul is **showing us how God judges**. So far we have learned that...

1) God judges according to truth (vv. 1-5).

2) God judges according to works (vv. 6-11).

3) God judges according to the Law (vv. 12-15).

This morning we will learn that...

4) God judges according to the gospel (v. 16).

Now, as we noted last time, **Romans 2:12-16** is one of the most difficult passages to interpret in the book of **Romans**. One of the many interpretive difficulties of this passage is **its structure** including the relationship of **v. 16** to the rest of the paragraph.

In **v. 12** Paul states that all people have sinned, both Gentiles and Jews. In **v. 13** Paul elaborates on **v. 12** by explaining how Jews have sinned by not doing the Law of God. Then in **vv. 14-15** Paul again elaborates on **v. 12** by explaining how Gentiles have sinned. Even though the Gentiles do not have the written Law of God that was given to Israel, God has written His moral Law upon their hearts so that all people have some basic moral awareness. We are by nature moral beings with an innate sense of right and wrong.

God has also given all people a conscience which is an internal moral guide that passes judgement on our actions. The human conscience either accuses us or excuses us based upon the standard of God's moral Law written in the heart.

And then as Paul moves to **v. 16**, some see this verse as the conclusion to **vv. 1-16**. Some see it as the continuation of **v. 12** (**vv. 13-15** are a parenthetical statement explaining **v. 12**). But others see it as a continuation of **v. 15** (I lean toward this view). In **v. 15** Paul speaks of the human conscience in legal terms. The Gentile is on trial in the court of human conscience. But in **v. 16** what Paul does is state that the private court of conscience in the human heart will one day be made public on the day of judgment.

Now, there are some things that Paul says about the judgement of God in **v. 16** that may surprise you. There is a **game** that is called: **One of These Things Is Not Like the Other**. For example, there may be a picture of an apple, a banana, a peach, and a cookie. One of these things is not like the other. Which is it? The cookie! In case you didn't know, a cookie is not a fruit.

In **Romans 2:16** in the minds of many people, one of these things is not like the other: There is the gospel, Jesus, and judgment. Which one does not seem to be like the other? Judgment. We don't normally think of the gospel, Jesus, and judgment as going together. But in this verse they go together.

We are going to look at this verse under **three headings** the first of which is...

I. The Finality of Divine Judgment.

We see this in the opening phrase of **v. 16**...

"On the day when...God will judge."

There are different philosophies of history. But according to the Bible **history is linear**. There was a definite beginning of the history of the world at creation. And there will also be a definite ending to the history of the world as we know it in the future on the day of judgment. So there is a day, a final day of judgment that is coming. Paul has already mentioned this day in **v. 5a**. But here, Paul returns to the idea of the day of judgment.

The world is not going to end because of nuclear war. The world is not going to end because of climate change. The world is not going to end because of anything that man does. The world as we know it will come to an end because God will bring it an end. And He will bring the world to an end on the final day of judgment. So listen dear people: All of history is moving inextricably to the final day of judgment, "One the day when...God will judge" mankind.

We live in a world filled with uncertainty (e.g. Russia's invasion of Ukraine; the threat of cyber attacks against the U.S.; inflation; oil/gas; tensions with China). There is so much uncertainty. But the final day of judgment is certain. It is as certain as anything can possibly be. It is a divine appointment that no one will miss (Heb. 9:27). The day is coming when you will stand before God and give an account of your life.

The second heading is...

II. The Scope of Divine Judgment.

We see this in the phrase which says...

"God will judge the secrets of men."

In **v. 6** Paul says that God will judge each person according to their deeds. But not only will God judge each person according to their deeds, He "will judge the secrets of men." God will judge our works and He will judge our hearts. God will judge what we do in public and what we do in private. God will judge not only what we do but why we do what we do. The day is coming dear people, when every human being who has ever lived will stand before God in judgment, and "God will judge the secrets of men." Cf. Luke 8:17

Charles Spurgeon, "If any man thinks ill of you, do not be angry with him, for you are worse than he thinks you to be."

If God were to merely judge our external behavior, if our secrets were to remain hidden on the day of judgment, some people might fare pretty well on the day of judgment because we are so good at hiding things from men. But God will not judge us merely on the basis of our external behavior, but on the basis of our hearts. And the sins of the heart are far more frequent than the sins of outward behavior: Pride, lust, envy, hatred, motives that are selfish. A person may never

commit the act of adultery. But if they lust in their heart for someone who is not their spouse they have committed adultery in the heart.

Listen, there is no such thing as a secret sin. Every sin you have ever committed you have committed before the eyes of God. Your entire life is like an open book before the eyes of God. And what you do in secret reveals who you really are. And God knows who you really are in secret.

As I have said before, the power of God to judge the world is breathtaking, especially in comparison to the vast limitations of human judgment. God's knowledge is **unlimited and infinite** whereas man's knowledge is **limited and finite**.

And because man's knowledge is so limited, there is a legal principle that is one of the cornerstones of our American legal system called **Blackstone's Formulation/Ratio**. It's called this because it was developed by the English jurist **William Blackstone** of the 18th century.

William Blackstone, "It is better that ten guilty persons escape than that one innocent suffer."

The **goal** of this legal principle is **not to allow the guilty to go free but to ensure that the innocent are not unjustly punished**. When a person is accused of a crime, it is a legal right in this country to be **presumed innocent**. If the justice system is going to **err** it must err on the side of innocence. In order for someone to be punished then, a person must be **proven guilty beyond any reasonable doubt**. This means that some who are guilty do go free when doubt is cast on their case. But the tradeoff is that the innocent are protected. And that is a good tradeoff.

John Adams, "It is of more importance to the community that innocence should be protected, than it is, that guilt should be punished; for guilt and crimes are so frequent in this world, that all of them cannot be punished."

As far as human justice goes, it is better to err on the side of letting the guilty go free than punishing the innocent. As hard as it is to accept, our justice system is at best human and as such very limited. It is impossible for men to right every wrong in this world. Ultimate justice cannot and will not ever be found in this life through the justice systems of men. In a fallen world there will always be injustice that goes unpunished. That's just how it is.

But the Bible teaches that ultimately no sin, no evil, and no act of injustice will go unpunished. Ultimately, God will execute justice, perfect justice, final justice at the appointed time on the day of judgment when He "will judge the secrets of men." It will be the day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God. God's judgment of all people will be perfectly just and righteous.

Now, think about what God must be able to do to judge billions of people with perfect justice:
A. God Knows All the Facts.

God knows everything about everything. God knows everything about everyone. God knows all the facts. God knows all the evidence. God knows everything that you do in public and in private. God knows all your secrets. God knows your every thought. God knows your every motive. God knows why you do what you do. God knows why you do what you do even when

you don't know why you do what you do. God knows you better than you know yourself.

God knows every word that you speak. God has a record of every conversation you've ever had. Nothing, absolutely nothing ever escapes the knowledge of God. He knows it all. Therefore, when God judges men His judgment will be based upon knowing all the facts including the secrets of men.

You can fool people. But you cannot fool God. You can deceive people. Children can deceive their parents. Parents can deceive their children. Employees can deceive their employers. You can even deceive yourself. But you cannot deceive God. God knows it all.

ILLUSTRATION: When I was in seminary, one of my classes took a field trip to the University of Southern California medical center which is the county hospital of Los Angeles. Our professor was a chaplain at the hospital so he gave us a tour. Two things that were especially memorable. First, we went to a small chapel where funerals were held. Before our class came into the chapel our professor had climbed into the casket without us knowing. When we came into the room he climbed out of the casket and scared us. Second, he showed us a room where the remains of people were kept who had never been identified. No one knew who they were. It was a reminder of the vast limitations of man's knowledge. But God knows it all. God knows who everyone one of those unidentified people are and He knows everything about them.

Because God knows all the facts, on the final day of judgment no one will be wrongly convicted of sins they didn't commit. And no one will escape justice who deserves to be punished.

There is something else God must be able to do to judge billions of people with perfect justice...

B. God Never Forgets.

God not only knows all the facts, He never forgets the facts. His memory of events including every detail never fades. There is no statute of limitations with God because His memory never grows dim or foggy. God knows all the facts and His knowledge is perfectly retained in His infinite mind.

A third thing God must be able to do to judge all people with perfect justice is...

C. God Shows No Partiality.

God's judgment is never influenced by men. God cannot be bribed. God is not impressed by a person's family, by a person's accomplishments, by a person's education, by a person's social standing or by how much influence or money they have. God's judgment is completely impartial. God's judgement is perfectly righteous. God cannot be influenced or intimidated in any way by men so that when He judges He will render to each person according to their deeds without partiality.

Jeremiah 17:10

That brings us to our third heading...

III. The Agent of Divine Judgment.

We see this in the last phrase...

"on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men *through Christ*

Jesus.”

God has appointed a final day of judgment. That’s the finality of divine judgment. On that day God will judge the secrets of men. That’s the scope of divine judgment. And He will do it “through Christ Jesus.” That’s the agent of divine judgment.

So, when you ask the question: Who is Jesus?, part of your answer must include: Jesus is the Judge.

We teach our children the song...

“Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.” And that is a wonderful truth. But we should also sing and say...

“Jesus will judge me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.”

Jesus is the Judge. When every human being who has ever lived is summoned to appear before God on the final of judgment, and their secrets will be made known, they will stand before the Lord Jesus Christ, for He is the Judge.

Dear people, this is a profound statement about the Deity of Jesus. One of lines of biblical evidence for the Deity of Jesus is that **He performs the works of God**. For example...

1. Jesus **created** the world (John 1:3, 10; 1 Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:2, 8, 10).
2. Jesus **sustains** the world (Col. 1:17; Heb. 1:3).
3. Jesus **rules** the world (Ps. 2:6-8; Dan. 7:13-14; Matt. 28:18; Rom. 14:9; Eph. 1:22; Phil. 2:10; 3:21; Heb. 2:8; Rev. 1:5; 19:16).
4. Jesus **will judge** the world (Matt. 19:28; 25:31-46; John 5:22-23, 27; Acts 10:42; 17:31; 1 Cor. 4:5; 2 Cor. 5:10; 2 Tim. 4:1; Rev. 20:11).

We know that Jesus is God because He does the works that only God can do: Jesus is the **Creator** of the world. He is the **Sustainer** of the world. He is the **Ruler** of the world. And He is the **Judge** of the world.

Notice how Paul says the truth of Jesus being the Judge is “according to my gospel.” The gospel which Paul preached included God’s judgment (**Acts 17:30-31**; cf. **10:42**). The gospel of Jesus Christ is a message that includes divine judgment. Part of the gospel message is that Jesus is the Judge.

You cannot talk about the gospel without talking about the holiness and righteousness of God. You cannot talk about the gospel without talking about the sinfulness of man and the fact that sinners are under the wrath of God. The day is coming when all men will stand before God who will judge even our secrets through Jesus Christ. And this truth is according to the gospel. So the message of the gospel includes the judgment of God. It is the gospel of judgment.

The gospel is only good news when you understand the bad news. The gospel is only good news

when you understand that the day of judgment is coming and that you are under the wrath of God. The future final day of judgment is what makes the gospel necessary. If there is no judgment against sin there is no need for a Savior. According to the gospel, Jesus died to save His people from their sin in order to save them from the wrath of Almighty God.

Charles Spurgeon, “You may think you can live fine without Christ, but you cannot afford to die without Him.”

If you die without Christ, then what is described in **2:5** will happen to you. You will stand alone with your sins before Jesus the Judge who will condemn you forever.

Conclusion: Are you prepared for the final day of judgment? What must you do to be ready for the day of judgment? You must run to the Judge, Jesus Christ (don’t run away from Him, run to Him). Why? Because the Judge is also the Savior of sinners. Jesus, the Judge, was judged on the cross for our sins. The worst things that you have ever done in secret, the most shameful acts you have ever committed, Jesus was punished for. All of our sins and all of our shame was laid upon Jesus at the cross where Jesus was judged in our place. Jesus died to pay the price for our sins so that we would not be condemned for our sins on the final day of judgment.

As Christians, our Judge is our Savior.

John Calvin, “It is no inconsiderable security that we shall stand before no other tribunal than that of our Redeemer.”

Jesus will not condemn us because He was condemned for us.

John Newton, “See the Judge, our nature wearing, clothed in majesty divine; You who long for His appearing then shall say, ‘This God is mine!’ Gracious Savior, own me in that day as Thine.”

As Christians, the final day of judgment will not be a day of condemnation but a day of reward. On that day God will vindicate the suffering of His people. God will reward all that we have done to serve Him and to love others. God will reward the things we have done in secret to serve Him things that perhaps no one else knows about. God will reward every good deed. God will reward every motive that has sought the glory of God.

The first thing you must do to prepare for the final day of judgment is to repent of your sin and come to Christ for salvation. And then you are to pursue a life of holiness, love, and obedience to Jesus Christ for the glory of God. Weigh every decision and every thought in light of the last day.

When Jonathan Edwards was a young man he wrote 70 resolutions. Here are two of them...

7. Resolved, never to do anything, which I should be afraid to do, if it were the last hour of my life.

17. Resolved, that I will live so as I shall wish I had done when I come to die.

If you knew that the final day of judgment was tomorrow, how would live today?

Live the entirety of your life in light of the coming final day of judgment.