

Romans: A Solid Foundation for Christian Living

Message 11: The Judgment and What to Do About It

Text: Romans 2:11-16

As I shared with you a couple of weeks back, we've entered one of the most difficult segments in the book of Romans – ch. 1 vs. 18 through chapter 3, where Paul emphasizes our need for salvation based on the reality of sin and our having earned God's wrath because of it. It's a subject we don't like to dwell on. We'd rather hear about God's love and forgiveness. And surely we will. But I've come to discover over the years that the difficult messages are just as important. There are some things that we may not want to know, but we need to know them. In fact, in some cases by ignoring the hard news, we diminish our experience of the good news.

Think about it. Have you ever heard someone say, "If I had known this, than I wouldn't have done that"? "If I had known the stock would fall like a rock, I wouldn't have invested my entire retirement in the company." Criminals say, "If I had known I would get caught, I wouldn't have done the crime." Teenagers say, "If I had known I would really get pregnant or get some STD, I wouldn't have been with that person." You get the idea. There are a lot of things that are true, but we don't really don't give them a second thought, at least not until the consequences come. Then we say, "if only I had known."

I wonder how many will stand in eternal judgment, receiving their sentence, and say, "If only I had known, I would have trusted Jesus." If only I had known the reality of God's role as ultimate judge of every human life, I would have done things differently – I would have lived differently – I certainly would have believed differently.

Well, this is the point of Romans 2:11-16, where the apostle Paul spells out the difficult but important message of God's judgment (read).

Now to understand what Paul says and why, let's go back through what we've studied so far. After introducing his letter and desire to minister to the Romans, Paul makes his key point in ch. 1, vs. 16-17: "*I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes...for in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last...*" From there Paul explains that everyone needs the gospel because everyone is guilty of sin, and therefore deserving of God's wrath. In 1:18-32 he applies this reality to the Gentiles, then in ch. 2 he makes the same case for the Jews.

Now, as you could imagine, this would be a pill hard to swallow. And you can imagine the response in the minds of the Roman people: "well that's not fair." And the Jews, "but we're God's chosen people – we have religion and we've kept the Law." And so, when you read the text, it is as if Paul expects this

debate, answering such concerns in vs. 12-16. Specifically, Paul spells out four truths about God's judgment that he believed to be important for the Roman church to know. And I believe they are important for us as well. Truth is the key. When we know the truth, we know how to respond. There is no more need to say, "If I had known, I would have...", because we do know. So, let's take a look at what Paul says about God's judgment, and then we'll close with some discussion about what to do about it.

1. God's judgment is universal.

Vs. 12-13: Whether you have the Law or not, there is an accounting. Those who do not have the Law perish apart from it. In other words, God holds them accountable for what they know. Keep in mind, according to ch. 1 vs. 20-21, they know enough. On the other hand, those who have the law will be judged by the law. But everyone will be judged. And the indication is that everyone will be found guilty (Rom. 3:23).

All this goes to what we discussed last week: Sin is universal and God holds those who know to a greater accountability. But in the end, everyone who has ever lived, and everyone alive today, and everyone yet to be born, is deserving of God's eternal wrath.

2. God's judgment is fair.

Vs. 14-15: "written on their hearts"

One of the expected responses to Paul's declaration of judgment is, "but that's not fair. I don't deserve that." And so Paul makes this case. He says, "Let's consider those who do not have God's Law. And yet, there are some things that the Law requires that they do – or at least they know to do. Why is that? Because the requirements of the law are written on their hearts."

What is Paul saying? He's saying that the basic principles of God's word are universal. It's not just the existence of God that people intuitively know. It's the basic principles of love, justice, and good living that we know.

III: Hamurabbi's code – ca. 1760 – not long after Abraham left Ur, the king of that city inscribed what is now the world's oldest written law. What's amazing is that 500 years before God gave the Jews the Law through Moses, here is a law code that recognizes murder, assault, and theft as crimes, and spells out a system of punishment and compensation. There are even means to protect the innocent from false charges. Justice, respect for persons, and fairness are all communicated. All this from a pagan city.

Why? Because the law of God is written on our hearts. And so, when we do not fully keep the law and become guilty of sin against it, God is fair in His judgment.

3. God's judgment is definite.

Vs. 16: "*This will take place on the day when God will judge men's secrets...*"

Paul says that it is coming. There is a definite day established when justice will come.

Some people question this. 2 Peter 3 addresses this issue: 2 Pet. 3:9-13

4. God's judgment is penetrating.

Vs. 16: "*...God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ...*" Secrets: the word describes vaults and cellars – places in which people would hide and guard their most precious possessions. There they would be jealously kept, that which we hold most valuable.

Get this: God will judge those secrets. There are things in our lives which we believe no one knows about. They are the secret treasures of our heart, things that we will not give up. The only problem is that we love them more than the Lord. We can hide them, but the Bible says that they will come to light. God sees them, and He will judge them (1 Cor. 4:5 – "*He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts.*")

Conclusion:

This is the truth about God's judgment: it is universal; it is fair; it is definite' and it is penetrating. Now comes the question, what do we do about it. Paul doesn't give the complete answer in our text, but he does point to it when, in vs. 16, he references the gospel. He says, "God will judge our secrets, as *the gospel declares.*"

And this takes us back to ch. 1, vs. 16: "*The gospel is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.*" See, when faced with the reality of judgment, there is only one response: the gospel of grace. Because we know the truth of God's judgment, we stop trying to beat it on our own and trust the one who has taken our judgment on Himself. Jesus died for you...

And so, if you have never yet trusted your life to Christ, this is the only response that matters...

On the other hand, as a Christian, perhaps you've neglected your walk with Him. In this case, it is not a matter of what you will be judged for, as what God has saved you from. Perhaps this morning you need to release the secret treasures of your heart and let Jesus have his rightful place in your life...