

HOW SHOULD WE UNDERSTAND MAN?

Paul's Anthropology from Romans 1-3—Part 4 (Romans 2:11-13)

By Dr. Steve P. Sullivan

Introduction

There is an ole saying which we hear often around tax season, "There are two things that are certain: death and taxes." Scripture changes this saying by declaring, "It is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment." It is a very solemn thought to think that everyone, you and me, will stand before the awesome God to be judged. There are many men who do not fear death, but shake in their boots when they contemplate the possibility of life after death where there is judgment.

Ever since the Fall of man in Genesis 3 man has sought ways to excuse his actions and claim that he is to be excused from judgment. We may think to be a U.S. citizen, or living in a Christian home or heritage, or because of Christian activities that we will be excused from the judgment of God. However, no one will escape God's judgment. There is no sadder picture then the person who believes they are saved and on the way to heaven but in actuality they are deceived and on the road to hell.

This is often the case in the life of people who may be very religious and moral but do not have a saving relationship with God. Such people often have heard the Word of God and they may know parts of the Bible, but they have never trusted the Savior. Paul directs his thoughts in Romans 2:11-16 toward this man and also again he makes comments about the man who has never heard the gospel. The question we want to investigate is this: "How does God judge the religious or moral person?" This article will deal with Romans 2:11-13 (NASB), "For there is no partiality with God. 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 just before God, but the doers of the Law will be justified."

The Judgment of God falls Upon the Sinner with the Law Romans 2:11-13

The subject of God's judgment begins in Romans 1:18—3:20. In Romans 1:18-32 God declares those who have never heard the gospel to be without excuse in His judgment. Then in Roman 2:1—3:8 Paul turns to the religious man or moralist. Paul is straightforward in his assessment of the moralist. He is without excuse. The moralist would be quick to condemn the Gentile heathen of Romans 1 but he doesn't realize that by judging the Gentile he condemns himself. He may not do the same sins or if he does the same sin he does not do it in the same degree. However, he breaks the Law of God just the same. Therefore, Paul sets forth principles by which God judges. The last two articles expounded upon two of these principles: (1) God's judgment is according to truth or reality; (2) God's judgment is according to deeds. A man is not justified or saved by his works, but he will be judged by his deeds. Furthermore, the fruit of saving faith issues forth in good works which demonstrates that a man has a living faith which is the only means of justification.

The final principle of God's judgment in this section is found in verse 11, "For there is no

partiality with God.” Partiality means to lift up or accept the face of anyone in such a way as to show favor. James uses this word in his book chapter 2:1-4, “My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with *an attitude of* personal favoritism. For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes, and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, ‘You sit here in a good place,’ and you say to the poor man, ‘You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool,’ have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives?” Men judge according to wealth, education, experience and who people know. But it is not that way with God. God does not look on the outward when He judges. God is not partial toward nationalities. He doesn’t favor us because we are Americans. He does not show partiality toward any color of skin. He doesn’t favor the educated. If we are highly educated, it does not bring God’s favor any more than being uneducated. The same can be said about economics and religious denominations. God does not judge with partiality.

Notice in verse 12 the word “for” which explains further what Paul means when he says God is impartial. He says God is impartial because God will judge all sinners guilty. Those without the Law of Moses will perish without the Law. There is no second chance. Also those who sin under the Law will be judged and condemned under the Law. So Paul shows that everyone is without excuse whether you have the Law of Moses or not. A Jew would be quite shocked by Paul’s words in verse 12b. A Jew knew that Gentiles without the Law of Moses were doomed, but now the execution sword was pointed at him. So Paul turns in verses 12b-13 to those who were sinners under the Law of Moses. God is impartial in judging them because He will judge men according to the light and privileges they received from God.

The first part of verse 12 is further explained in verses 14-15 which deals with the Gentiles without the Law. The last half of verse 12 is further expounded upon in verse 13 which deals with the Jews. The Jewish people had the choice privilege of hearing the Word of God from their parents, priests, and synagogues. Their judgment for breaking the Law will be greater because they had the special light of revelation and a greater privilege. Many Jews thought that their privilege of being in the nation and having the truth (the Law) and not rebelling against its teaching would cause judgment to pass them by. They thought the Gentiles would be the only ones to be judged. Now Paul says God will punish the Jew with a severe judgment because the Jew had more light and privilege.

It would be just as shocking as the following illustration. Let us say that the local police caught two young men in a robbery. The judge gives the first young man a light sentence of five years because of his background. His father had a prison record and his mother was a woman of ill repute. He grew up on the streets and dropped out of school. The judge turns to the second young man and sentences him to 10 years in prison. It is not that he was more guilty than the other, but he had greater light and better privileges. He had honorable parents and had the privilege of church training and was educated in the finest schools. He chose to abandon the privilege and the light of family, culture and education, so his judgment was greater. If this would actually happen in today’s courts, we would be shocked. This is how the Jew felt when Paul says, “all who have sinned under the Law will be judged by the Law.”

Now Paul again uses the word “for” in verse 13 because he wants to stress further the last part of verse 12. He states that it is not the hearer of the Law who is justified but the man who does the Law (if he could do it) that will be justified. The word “justify” denotes the

(forensic) verdict of acquittal by God.¹ Now someone may question whether Paul is contradicting himself when he says that justification is by works? Is not Paul a champion of justification by faith alone? Yes. Well then, why does he say that a doer of the Law is justified?

Let me remind you that the theme of Romans is that justification is by faith (Romans 1:16-17). Notice what Paul says at the end of his argument in this section, “because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law *comes* the knowledge of sin. But now apart from the Law *the* righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction.” It is obvious Paul is not advocating works for salvation. However, what does he mean in verse 13 that “the doers of the Law will be justified?” It is important to notice the immediate context. The immediate context is the latter half of verse 12 which is further explained in verse 13. Notice in verse 12b that the subject is not salvation, but judgment and the Law, for it says, “and all who have sinned under the Law will be judged by the Law.” It is absolutely crucial to place Paul’s statement in the context of keeping the Law in the light of God’s judgment. In context Paul is saying (hypothetically) that only those who do the law without breaking it could be justified by law keeping.² The problem is that no one can keep the law perfectly without breaking it in one point. James 2:10 says, “For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all.” Again in Galatians 3:10-12, “For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse; for it is written, ‘CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO DOES NOT ABIDE BY ALL THINGS WRITTEN IN THE BOOK OF THE LAW, TO PERFORM THEM.’ Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for, ‘THE RIGHTEOUS MAN SHALL LIVE BY FAITH.’ However, the Law is not of faith; on the contrary, ‘He who practices them shall live BY THEM.’” Since no one can live by the Law perfectly then everyone who tries to be justified by keeping the Law is condemned under the statement of Romans 2:12b, “all who have sinned under Law will be judged by the Law.”

What has Paul told us thus far? He says God’s judgment is impartial for He will judge a man according to the light and privilege he received. Also the moralist or Jew who knows the Law will be judged guilty under that Law.

It is a very sobering thought to think that someone could come to church and hear Sunday after Sunday the gospel of Jesus Christ—that He was the substitute that could take away my judgment by dying on the cross and rising the third day. Indeed, it is sobering to think that someone may come and hear and learn *about* Christ, but never trust Him alone as the one who paid for his sins at Calvary. He hears and hears, but he trusts in his works or keeping the Law for his eternal destiny. He rests in the false assurance of hearing something familiar—the gospel, the teaching of the Bible or the Law—and becomes lulled asleep to eternal doom. If you are this kind of person, then you, by God’s grace, have received a great privilege and light and if you do not respond in faith alone you will be doomed to hell with a greater judgment. Oh, my friend, do not delay. Throw away your confidence in hearing and doing and trust in Christ’s substitutionary death by faith alone!

Endnotes

¹ See Douglas Moo, *The Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary: Romans 1-8*, ed. Kenneth Barker, pp. 143-44 for a brief but concise argument for dikaiow. Also S. Lewis Johnson, Jr. “Studies in Romans Part V: The Judgment of God,” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Jan-Mar, 1973, pp. 30-31.

² Charles Hodge, *Romans*, p. 54.