



The Epistle to the Romans

Lesson Number 5



GOD'S RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENT

^{2:1}Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. ²But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things. ³And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God? ⁴Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? ⁵But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, ⁶who "will render to each one according to his deeds": ⁷eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; ⁸but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness; indignation and wrath, ⁹tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek; ¹⁰but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹¹For there is no partiality with God. ¹²For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law ¹³(for not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified; ¹⁴for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, ¹⁵who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them) ¹⁶in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel. (Romans 2:1-16^{NKJV})

INTRODUCTION

In order to firmly fix in our minds the absolute necessity of a righteousness from God, the Spirit is showing us the impact of sin upon humanity. He is removing every vestige of hope in the flesh, confirming it to be utterly corrupt. In Adam there is nothing but death, for

"*in Adam all die*" (1 Cor 15:22). The argument is devastating. Jesus assured us of the impotence of the "*flesh*," or the natural part of us, coming from Adam, when He said, "*That which is born of flesh is flesh.*" His point is that this condition requires the new birth: i.e., our

natural birth itself requires that we be "*born again*" (John 3:3-6). There is no way that flesh can rise above the one from whom it was born—Adam. Men are "*sinful*" by nature as well as by deed. In fact, it is their nature that compels them to sin, and causes them to stumble.

LESSON OUTLINE

- I. INEXCUSABLE (2:1)
- II. THE JUDGMENT OF GOD (2:2-3)
- III. THE GOODNESS OF GOD (2:4)
- IV. TREASURING UP WRATH (2:5A)
- V. GOD'S RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENT REVEALED (2:5B-10)
- VI. NO PARTIALITY WITH GOD (2:11)
- VII. SIN AND THE LAW (2:12)
- VIII. NOT HEARERS, BUT DOERS, ARE JUSTIFIED (2:13)
- IX. A WRITING IN THE HEART (2:14-15)
- X. THE DAY GOD WILL JUDGE (2:16)

However, the Spirit does not say that men can do nothing but sin—although that is technically the truth. Although that approach has been taken by some theological persuasions, it is not the Divine manner. Those limiting themselves to such reasoning will find themselves involved in endless arguments with the unlearned. Men will argue that humanity has not been thoroughly contaminated by sin, but retains some vestiges of goodness.

Man has in particular, they will argue, retained the power of choice and reason, and thus can be salvaged. While there is an element of truth to this, it is lacking in both incentive and power.

The Spirit shows us the affects of sin, and does not theorize about it. Already, He has declared that, although surrounded by unquestionable evidence of the “*eternal power and Divinity*” of God, men chose to worship

and serve the created rather than the Creator (1:19-25). Delivered to his own lusts, a staggering moral plummet took place, where men conducted themselves “*contrary to nature*” in debasing and reprehensible sins (1:26-27). Others, who did not stoop to that level were characterized by a wide range of degenerate behavior that sharply contrasted with the Divine nature (1:28-

31). Rather than seeking the God of Whom nature testified, they found their pleasure in sinful peers, who had also fallen short of the glory of God (1:32).

Thus, with great effectiveness, we have been shown both the power and universality of sin. But the thread of reasoning does not stop here. There remains a segment of humanity that appears to have risen above all of these reprehensible vices. Through culture, the flesh has been so polished as to make it appear acceptable. But it is not. Men have only masked sin. Their outward sanctity is only pretension, and within, like the Pharisees, they are “*full of dead men's bones*” (Matt 23:27).

All men need the righteousness of God. The idolater, sodomite, and those expressing attitudes and works contrary to the Divine nature stand together in a common need. Now we will see that the sanctimonious need a righteousness from God also. No man is excused from sin, and thus all men need a righteousness from God—the righteousness of God Himself. All men need this righteousness

INEXCUSABLE

“^{2:1} Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things.” No one has been able to escape the devastating effects of sin. Yet, there are some who imagine that they have, because they are able to subdue the outward expressions of it. Such people take it upon themselves to judge others upon the basis of their external achievements. Thus the cultured Greeks thought nothing of referring to the less cultured as “*Barbarians*.” The Spirit is confirming, however, that the Gospel is a message to “*both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians*” (Rom 1:14). They stand together in their need for a Savior and a righteousness from God. The disciplines of both body and mind, however admirable they may appear, are no substitute for the righteousness of God. Although these things have been held in high regard by men, they are not honored by God. As our

Lord said, “*for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God*” (Lk 16:15).

One might remonstrate, pointing to men like Cornelius, whose prayers and alms came up before God for a “*memorial*” (Acts 10:4). He was neither Jew nor born again. Some might object, “*How is it that his works were received by God?*” Although his works were, indeed, honorable, they had no saving efficacy. God did not pronounce Cornelius “*righteous*” because of his prayers and alms. Instead, he sent a man to tell him what he “*ought to do*”—words where by he and his house “*will be saved*” (Acts 10:6; 11:13-14). He too needed a righteousness from God. The conduct and prayers of Cornelius indicated he had seen his need of the Lord, having no righteousness of his own. That sort of individual is not described in this text. Rather, it is the person who assigns value to his own accomplishments, and speaks derisively of

those who have not measured up to his pretentious standards. You will immediately recognize the presence of this attitude in the religious community.

The Jews will be the particular focus of this chapter, although that focus does not exclude the moralists extant among the Greeks.

INEXCUSABLE

The word “*inexcusable*” is an unusually strong one. It leaves no room for negotiation or explanation. It means without excuse, or indefensible. God will not allow the individual to explain the reasoning behind the condemned action, because no acceptable rationale can be offered for it.

There are those who do not approve of idolatry, sodomy, and the various vices that have already been mentioned. They would raise their voice in protest of such things, yet still perceive no need for a

righteousness from God. This would include men like Socrates (469-399 B.C.), Plato (428-347 B.C.), Aristotle (384-322 B.C.), and those influenced by their thinking. They exalted thought, and even probed the spiritual nature of man. Yet, to a man, they all rejected God. Such men are representative of some of the individuals now addressed in our text. The indictment will also include the Jews, who clung to religious form, but lacked the power that comes through the Gospel alone. In principle, it will also include those who identify themselves with Christ, yet do not seek a righteousness from God.

THOSE WHO JUDGE

The attention of the Spirit is now turned to hypocrites, who pass judgment upon others, yet have no regard for their own need of righteousness. This is not the “*righteous judgment*” of which our Lord spoke (John 7:24). This is rather the hypercritical judgment of Matthew seven. “*Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. And why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me remove the speck from your eye’; and look, a plank is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye*” (7:1-5).

This is a judgment that results from men “*measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves*” (2 Cor 10:12). Their own boastful achievement is the criteria by which others are judged. But, like the Pharisees, only the outside of their lives is clean. Of them, Jesus said, “*Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness. Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness*” (Matt 23:27-28). In fact, apart from the salvation effected by the Gospel that is all men **can** clean—the outside. Only God can purify the heart. To put it another way,

men cannot change their own nature. As Jeremiah put it, “*Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil*” (Jer 13:23).

The point of the text is not simply that sitting in judgment upon others is wrong. The point being established is that all men stand in need of a righteousness from God. Those who refuse God’s righteousness, placating their own conscience with the imagination that they have achieved a righteousness of their own, are the subjects of this admonition.

SELF-CONDEMNATION

The outward show of goodness is not sufficient to establish that one is righteous. Sin has contaminated man at

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his very core, so that sin dwells in him, and is at home in him. Even the seemingly best of people have this problem. As Paul confessed, “. . . *sin that dwells in me . . . evil is present with me . . . another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind . . .*” (Rom 7:17,20,21,23).

The presence of the principle of sin within us should keep us from having a condemning spirit. It is only the “*new creation*” that is pure before God, and that “*workmanship*” belongs to the Lord alone (Gal 6:15; Eph 2:10).

Although in principle this text applies to the cultured Greeks, it more fully applies to the Jews. The Gentiles had been given the testimony of nature. The Jews had been given the fuller testimony of the Law. Every possible advantage had been given to them, so that, if it was possible, they could have become righteous through their own works. They are described as “*Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the*

service of God, and the promises; of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen” (Rom 9:4-5). Truly, they excelled in advantages.

Because of their distinction from all other nations, they sat in judgment upon them. But their natures remained the same as the nations they condemned, even though it was often subdued. To such Jesus says, “*Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned*” (Luke 6:37).

ILLUSTRATED IN DAVID

Although David was a man after God’s own heart (1 Sam 13:14; Acts 13:22), he also stood in need of a righteousness from God. His nature had been polluted by sin even as others. In him, we find an example of the kind of judgment our text mentions.

When David sinned with Bathsheba, it was a most grievous sin in the eyes of the Lord. It is written, “*But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD*” (2 Sam 11:27). Because David’s conscience had not yet stricken him, the Lord sent Nathan the prophet to confront him about the matter. Nathan related an account of two men: one rich, and one poor. The rich man had large flocks and herds, while the poor man had only “*only little ewe lamb.*” He had “*bought and nourished up*” the little lamb. In fact, it grew up with him and his children, and ate the man’s food and drank from his cup. A certain traveler came to the rich man’s house. Instead of taking from his own bountiful flock, the rich man “*took the poor man’s lamb, and dressed it for the man that was come to him.*” It was a pathetic thing to do.

Upon hearing of this gross injustice, David became incensed. “*And David’s anger was greatly kindled against the man; and he said to Nathan, As the LORD liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die: and he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity. And Nathan said to David, Thou art the man*” (2 Sam 12:1-7). Nathan continued, “*Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, I anointed thee king over Israel, and I delivered thee out*

of the hand of Saul; And I gave thee thy master's house, and thy master's wives into thy bosom, and gave thee the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would moreover have given unto thee such and such things. Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the LORD, to do evil in his sight? thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and hast taken his

wife to be thy wife, and hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon" (v. 7-9). This is one of the most tragic incidents of all Scripture. It shows the need of a righteousness from God.

That is the kind of judgment we are dealing with. It is a judgment that sees and judges harshly wrong doing on the part of others, yet fails to recognize the

corruption within self. There is no person who does not have the seeds of corruption within. Even it is not expressed frequently, or the appearance of it is kept down, yet it disqualifies one being called righteous. That condition—the natural state of all men—demands that a righteousness be received from God. There is other option if one is to be received by the Living God.

THE JUDGMENT OF GOD

"But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things. ³And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God?"

It is essential that we understand "the judgment of God" to be an expression of His nature, or Person. It is something that cannot be forever suppressed. Eventually, God will confront and condemn everything and everyone that is contrary to Him. It is inevitable. His throne is "prepared . . . for judgment" (Psa 9:7), and the preparation is not in vain. Not only does "mercy and truth" go before His "face," but, He declares, "justice and judgment are the habitation of His throne" (Psa 89:14; 97:2).

JUDGMENT THROUGH JESUS

These qualities have not disappeared in Jesus. Rather, He has come to affirm them forever. As it is written, "Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever" (Isa 9:6-7). Eventually, "we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ" (2 Cor 5:10), for God "will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom He hath ordained; whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised Him from the dead" (Acts 17:31). Not one small portion of His judgment

will be compromised at that time. It will be thoroughly righteous, and in complete keeping with His Divine and holy nature.

This circumstance is what required the atoning death of Christ, for sin could not be removed in any other way. Only those whose sins have been "covered," and to whom the Lord will "not impute

He then judged sin, as compelled by His own nature. In this outpouring of His wrath, Jesus was "made a curse," thereby confirming the indignation of God that is toward all unrighteousness and ungodliness of men Gal 3:13).

REMEMBER THE PURPOSE

Remember the purpose for this text.

It is to confirm the need of a righteousness from God. Not only is man lacking a righteousness that stands the test of Divine judgment, He is not capable of producing such a righteousness.

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The wrath of God is against ALL unrighteousness and ungodliness of men (Rom 1:18). Earlier, those who stopped short of a quest for God, creating false gods and images of them, have been shown to be unrighteous and without excuse (1:19-25). Too, those who have stooped to the sin of sodomy have been proved particularly reprehensible. Their conduct was the result of being

turned over to the base passions of the flesh (1:26-27). Additionally, those who did not fall into the baser sins (only because God did not deliver them over to such base lusts), were given over a "reprobate mind." Their own nature and way of thinking caused them to be "filled" with all manner of unrighteousness (1:28-32).

Now, the Spirit is showing that those having a more refined appearance have not managed to extricate themselves from sin. In the case of Gentile philosophers, the sinful nature remained, corrupting them within. The Jews, even in covenant

sin," will survive the judgment day. No wonder such people are called "blessed" (Psa 32:1-2; Rom 4:6-8).

SIN JUDGED IN JESUS

In Christ, the judgment of God against sin was fulfilled. As it is written, "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh" (Rom 8:3). In this case, "the flesh" was Christ's flesh, which bore only "the likeness" of sinful flesh. By imputation, our sins being placed upon Him, God made Jesus "to be sin for us" (2 Cor 5:21).

with, and blessed by, the true God, were likewise in bondage to sin. Although they experienced miraculous deliverance, direction, and provision, their nature remained unchanged. Even when they were given a Law from heaven, and Prophets to correct them, they remained fundamentally sinful. They are described as a *“disobedient and gainsaying (contrary) people”* (Rom 10:21).

Armed with the Law, and a unique status with God, they sat in judgment upon others, while doing *“the same things”* as those they judged.

JUDGMENT ACCORDING TO TRUTH

Our text reads, *“We are SURE that the judgment of God is according to truth against them which commit such things.”* ^{KJV} Other versions read *“we KNOW . . .”* This word (*“sure,”* or *“know”*), means perceive, see, or understand. This is the description of a dominating understanding—one that cannot be avoided. **God cannot overlook the sinful nature!** His character will not allow Him to do so. Even when our sins were placed upon the pure Lamb of God, His judgment broke forth against it. His judgment is *“according to truth.”*

This expression (*“according to truth”*) means in strict keeping with the real situation. It also speaks of conformity to God’s own nature. Those who willingly entertain a preference for sin will be exposed when God *“judges the world.”* Their judgment will **not** be according to their profession. Nor, indeed, will it be according to a theological position they embraced and propagated. It will be *“according to truth.”* If, for example, they are Jews, and can boast of having the Law, the Divine service, the covenants, and all manner of other benefits, they will still be judged *“according to truth.”* It is what they are within that will determine their destiny. The due consideration of this reality will make sin distasteful.

Those who do **not** possess the righteousness of God will be judged according to their own righteousness, and it will **not** stand up under Divine scrutiny! I am persuaded this is not generally known in the *Christian* community—at least not in any satisfactory measure. The failure of men to speak of the righteousness of God, and

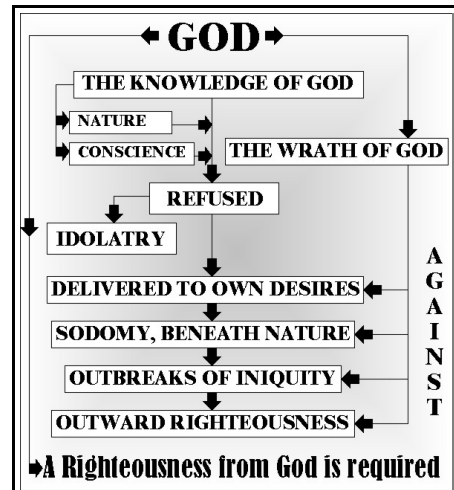
its conferment upon men through Christ, confirms this to be the case. God will not play games with people, pretending they are something they are not. He will have no respect of persons, but will judge all men *“according to truth.”*

His judgment will be **“AGAINST”** those who practice such things as have been described (1:19-32). It makes little difference whether they are flagrantly practiced outwardly, or entertained in the privacy of the heart and mind. For it to be any other way would require that God *“deny Himself,”* and He **CANNOT** do that (2 Tim 2:13).

The person who *“does”* sin, or allows its expression, must not think for one moment that he will *“escape the judgment of God.”* Such a person is deceived. It makes no difference what official theology he has embraced, or how convinced he is that he is safe in his sin. Jesus came to deliver men from wrath, saving them from their sins (Matt 1:20), and making them free from its power and consequences (John 8:36). Those who remain under the dominion of sin have not been delivered or freed, and the judgment of God is against them. This condition cannot be covered up by a theology that says once they are saved they are always saved, or that they cannot lose their salvation. All such teachings are an attempt to misrepresent God and His great salvation.

ONLY ONE HOPE

There is only one hope, and that is to possess *“the righteousness of God!”* No other righteousness, however acceptable it may appear to men, will be recognized by



God. Furthermore, the righteousness of God is not intended to make us analysts of our peers, but acceptable to God. That is its sole purpose.

ONE FINAL TIME

Lest it escape our attention, permit me to state the intention of this text once again. The judgment of God is against all unrighteousness and ungodliness of men. There is no possible way for this to fail of fulfillment. Those who rely upon their own righteousness, and even judge others while doing so, will also be subject to this devouring judgment.

Unrighteousness is the necessary consequence of sin—Adam’s sin. Thus it is written, *“through the offence of one many be dead . . . judgment was by one to condemnation . . . by one man’s offence death reigned by one . . . Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation . . . by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners”* (Rom 5:15-19).

To confirm this is the case, God turned men over to their own corrupted minds, and a descent into the quagmire of sin resulted. The only reason some segments of our race, particularly the Jews, did not descend as far as others was owing to Divine restraint, not human discipline. Delivered over to the corruption of the human heart, there is no depth to which humanity will not fall.

Thus, those who judge others worthy of condemnation, while themselves failing to appropriate the righteousness of God, will be judged harshly. They too possess a corrupt and defiled heart. The things for which they condemn others are actually resident in their own hearts, even though they may succeed in subduing a public outbreak of them.

The point is that they also need the righteousness of God—the righteousness that is announced by the Gospel of Christ. It is not acceptable to merely be clean outwardly. Men need real righteousness. The judgment and consequent wrath of God is against everything else. God is greatly to be praised for providing a righteousness that will stand in the day when He judges the world through Christ. Be eager to possess it. Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.

THE GOODNESS OF GOD

“Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?” These words may appear harsh, but they are not. They are more like the passionate words of a gracious individual trying to convince a perishing person to come out of a condemned and burning house. Those who do not possess the righteousness of God, and particularly those who are going about to establish their own (Rom 10:3), must see the situation correctly. Such might imagine that the absence of Divine visitation upon them is indication that God approves of them. They thus reason, “If God is not punishing me, He must receive me and place worth upon my good works.” But this is not at all the case. The Spirit will now show us the graciousness of God in forbearing the punishment of the self-righteous.

THE ACT OF DESPISING

The word “*despise*” is an usually strong one. Coming from *καταφρονεις*, it means to treat with contempt, look down upon, and think nothing of. More particularly, it means “to treat with neglect, disregard, despise, disdain, or think little or nothing of.”^{Thayer} This is not an intellectual sin, as though a person thought upon the goodness of God and replied, “I hate God’s goodness, and want nothing to do with it.” Rather, something that is despised is NOT thought upon. It is pushed to the back of human thought in preference for other things. Thus, to despise the goodness of the Lord is to consider it unworthy of extended thought or energetic pursuit. The consideration of Divine goodness is rejected in favor of other priorities.

Those who ponder God’s “*goodness and forbearance and longsuffering*” will come to the same conclusion as Jeremiah. “*It is of the LORD’S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not*” (Lam 3:22). With understanding, those who do not despise these Divine qualities will say with Jacob, “*I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and*

of all the truth, which thou hast showed unto thy servant” (Gen 32:10).

To despise the Lord’s “*goodness and forbearance and longsuffering*” is to fail to come to these conclusions. It is to neglect to see that only the withholding of Divine wrath has kept sinners alive. Only the longsuffering of the Lord has stopped them from dropping into hell. Rather than God recognizing their good works, He has had to restrain Himself from destroying them because of their deeds. That is the real situation.

One of the treacherous traits of lukewarmness is that it leads one to despise what is sorely needed for recovery and acceptance. We are living in such a time. Men—religious men—seem blissfully

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unaware of, and disinterested in, the goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering of God. It is a most serious condition.

THE RICHES OF HIS GOODNESS

“*. . . the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering . . .*” The goodness of God is a rich repository for the soul. When the Lord revealed His glory to Moses, He described the disclosure in these words: “*I will make all my goodness pass before thee*” (Ex 33:19). As “*the Lord passed by before Him,*” the Lord Himself “*proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth*” (Ex 34:6).

Goodness

The “*goodness*” of man does not “*extend*” to God (Psa 16:2), but God’s “*goodness*” is “*laid up for those who fear*” Him (Psa 31:19). The Divine attribute of “*goodness*” includes kindness and a gracious attitude. It accents that sinners have not provoked God to act contrary to His own nature.

The expression “*riches of His goodness*” emphasizes the abundance of kindness and gracious consideration. However, His goodness must be properly understood. Rather than constraining God to merely tolerate the insolence and self-righteousness of man, it is an expression of the intention to convert men to Himself, turning them away from their own vanity. This will be further developed in the following comments.

“Forbearance”

The “*riches*” of God’s “*forbearance*” speaks of His leniency toward those deserving His wrath. It is true that God prefers mercy over sacrifice (Hos 6:6). The Lord forbears pouring His wrath upon men in order that He might show mercy to them. That is His preference. He is not looking for a reason to condemn men, but for an opportunity, so to speak, to save them.

Longsuffering

The “*riches*” of His “*longsuffering*” stresses the Lord’s “*patience, forbearance, longsuffering, and slowness in avenging wrongs.*”^{Thayer} One of the very wonderful attributes of our God is “*slow to anger.*” As it is written, “*The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. He will not always chide: neither will he keep his anger for ever*” (Psa 103:8-9). Again it is written, “*The LORD is gracious, and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of great mercy*” (Psa 145:8).

In pleading with Israel, Joel appealed to the longsuffering of God—His slowness to anger, and preference to bless the people. “*So rend your heart, and not your garments; Return to the LORD your God, For He is gracious and merciful,*

slow to anger, and of great kindness; And He relents from doing harm^{NKJV} (Joel 2:13). This is God's nature.

In his foolish protestation of God showing mercy on Nineveh, Jonah said he knew God was longsuffering. *"I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm"* (Jonah 4:2). He was correct in this observation, but was unaware that the message he delivered to Nineveh was the means God chose to be gracious.

The longsuffering of God is actually *"space to repent,"* allowing for man to turn his face toward the Lord, and engage in a fervent quest for Him (Rev 2:21).

THE TRAGEDY OF NOT KNOWING

*" . . . not knowing that the goodness of God . . . "*Already humanity has been charged with not retaining God in their knowledge (1:28). Now the Spirit reveals the affects of that action. It brought men to the point where they did NOT know the means through which they could be brought to repentance.

Wherever it is found, this is an inexcusable ignorance. God has made Himself known to men. That revelation confirmed that He is good, forbearing, and longsuffering. When this is not *"known,"* a condition is introduced that will, if not corrected, eventually lead to condemnation. As it is written, *"when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed"* (2 Thess 1:7-10).

The Spirit moved Peter to state the reality and value of God's longsuffering, relating it to salvation. *"The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should*

perish but that all should come to repentance^{NKJV} (2 Pet 3:9). Divine longsuffering is not a mere idea.

The world says, "What you do not know cannot hurt you." But nothing could be further from the truth. In the Kingdom of God, ignorance is lethal, and not knowing is disastrous.

BEING LED TO REPENTANCE

" . . . the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance . . . " However, all is not hopeless, praise the Lord! The *"goodness of God,"* duly considered, will provoke repentance in those who have been deceived and hardened by sin. **It is true that those who are favored by God, regardless of the extent of that**

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favor, have despised His goodness if they remain impenitent.

If men will ponder *"the goodness of God,"* allowing their hearts and minds to dwell upon it, it will lead them to any required repentance. This is the best way to come to repentance, much to be preferred over His chastening. This is the aspect of spiritual life to which the Spirit referred when He said, *"For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world"* (1 Cor 11:31-32). Rather than stubbornly continuing in sin, seeking their own fleshly satisfaction, men ought to ponder how good God has been to them. He has not dealt with them *"according to"* their sins (Psa 103:10). By this, the Spirit means God's judgments have been less harsh than the sins of men deserve.

Even in His punishments, God is good, allowing for men to be sensitive and come to Him. No wonder it is twice stated in Scripture, *"but I will correct thee in*

measure, and will not leave thee altogether unpunished" (Jer 30:11; 46:28). His judgment never goes beyond the boundary of God's character.

All of this is designed to provoke men to repent of their refusal to retain God in their knowledge. It is intended to turn them from seeking their own ways to seeking the Lord, to which vocation they have been appointed (Acts 17:26-27).

We must never permit this truth to escape us: *"the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance."* It LEADS us when we ponder it, thinking upon the good things He has done, and of His tenderness toward us. This will only come., however, when the seriousness of transgression and the need for a righteousness from God are duly considered. When these two conditions are not contemplated, the goodness of God will not lead us.

Divine influence is required if repentance is to be realized. Traditionally, men have described repentance as a change of mind, and, indeed, that is the truth. However, changing a mind that has been devoted to sin is no small task.

It is equivalent to a leopard changing its spots, or an Ethiopian the color of his skin (Jer 13:23). Notwithstanding that difficulty, repentance is imperative. As Jesus said, *"but unless you repent you will all likewise perish"* (Lk 13:3,5).

Repentance Is A Gift

Jesus has been exalted to *"give repentance"* (Acts 5:31). Thus the Savior is said to have been sent from God *"to bless you, in turning away every one of you from your iniquities"* (Acts 3:26). When the Gentiles turned to God, early believers assessed the remarkable event in these words: *"Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life"* (Acts 11:18). That is why Jesus said repentance was to be *"preached,"* or declared (Lk 24:47). When servants of God are endeavoring to recover sinners, they are to do so believing *"God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will"* (2 Tim 2:25-26). That provides a great incentive to recover sinners.

Our text has revealed the manner in which the Lord gives repentance. It is not an overpowering or crushing of the human spirit, but a gentle leading into a change of mind. It occurs as the sinner is exposed to the marvelous goodness of

God, particularly as declared in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

I have taken the time to briefly elaborate on this because I am persuaded this aspect of repentance is not generally

known. I believe this accounts for the lack of emphasis upon the Gospel of Christ, as well as the unacceptable level of moral deficiency and weakness within the professed church. It is a most serious condition for which much grace is needed.

TREASURING UP WRATH

“^{6a}But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath . . . ”

HARDNESS AND IMPENITENCE

Here is truth worthy of extended consideration. Hardness and a lack of repentance (“*impenitence*”) always go together. Men do not repent because their hearts are calloused and hard. Also, their hearts become even more stony because they do not repent. A lack of repentance is never innocent, incidental, or to be treated as though it were not lethal to the soul. Unless a person repents, hell is sure.

“*Impenitence*” is more than simply not repenting. It is REFUSING to repent, obstinately clinging to sin under the delusion that it brings advantage.

When men struggle with making the right choice, it is because of hardness of heart. We do well not to adopt an approach that leaves them thinking they have a lot of time to make up their minds concerning the Lord. Away with long-term orientation programs designed to prepare people to become Christians. Where did such a foolish notion originate? Let there be a return to the urgency of turning to the Lord.

Moses

Moses said, “*I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore CHOOSE life, that both thou and thy seed may live*” (Deut 30:19). He did not say “think,” but “choose!” The choice was to be made, and made at that time. “*Choose life.*”

Joshua

Joshua challenged the people, “*And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD*” (Josh 24:25). If the people refused to serve the Lord, Joshua demanded that they decide that very day which god they were going

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to serve. He would not let them imagine a state of indecision was allowed.

Elijah

When Elijah confronted four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal, he first challenged the children of Israel. “*How long will you falter between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him*” (1 Kgs 18:21). He did not see remaining in the state of indecision as in any way advantageous. He called upon the people to make up their mind, and do it then!

John the Baptist

When John the Baptist arrived on the scene, sent by God (John 1:6), he confronted a spiritually sterile people. He did not provide an orientation course to

ease the transition from disinterest to interest. Instead he cried out, “*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!*” (Matt 3:2). He did not mean “think about repenting.” His was a summons to repent NOW, else they would miss the blessing.

The Lord Jesus Christ

When Jesus came out of the wilderness, having been tempted of the devil, He began to preach “*Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*” (Matt 4:17). There was nothing casual about His word. He did not provide an academic study to acclimate people to a new way of thinking. His call was to repent NOW!

MORE ON THE HUMAN CONDITION

As is characteristic of the Gospel, our text is providing more insight into the condition of sinners. In particular, it is showing the state of everyone who does not possess the righteousness of God. Remember, the point being developed is that **men need a righteousness from God**. It is not a luxury, but a necessity.

Already the Spirit has shown us that human nature has been so corrupted that men left to their own devices descend into unimaginable depths of sin. There is not a soul that will rise higher, seek God, or become righteous, if delivered over to the desires of their mind.

Secondly, those who have achieved some degree of external refinement (whether Gentiles by philosophy or Jews by the Law) are nevertheless under condemnation. They too need a righteousness from God, because their own righteousness is nothing but filthy rags, to be quickly discarded (Isa 64:6).

Now the Spirit gives us another reason for eagerly seeking to obtain “the righteousness of God” that is announced in the Gospel.

WRATH CAN BE TREASURED UP

“You are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath.” The Spirit has already told us that God’s wrath is against “all unrighteousness and ungodliness of men.” God cannot make peace with sin, and consequently not with sinners. In due time, the wrath of God will break forth against all who are not reconciled to Him. Our text refers to that time as “the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous

believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him”^{NASB} (John 3:18,36). For the righteous, treasures in heaven are increasing. For the wicked, the wrath of God is increasing.

The very day in which the righteous will be rewarded is the one in which the wicked will be punished. For the righteous, it is the “day of redemption” (Eph 4:30). For the unrighteous, it is “the day of wrath,” “the great day of His wrath,” and “the wrath of the Lamb” (Rev 6:16,17).

Accenting this aspect of the Lord’s return (i.e., that the righteous will be rewarded and the unrighteous punished), the Spirit says the following. “You who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the

gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, WHEN HE COMES, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed” (2 Thess 1:7-10). Thus, the very day when Jesus comes to be glorified in His saints, and admired by all who believe, will be the day when He takes vengeance on all who know not God and obey not the Gospel.

Whether knowingly or unknowingly, all men are storing up for that day. Either wrath or blessing is being “stored up.” God is not indifferent to the way people respond to Him, even though His longsuffering is so interpreted by sinners.

A CONSIDERATION

We live in a time when the urgency of appropriating salvation has been replaced with a sort of gentle tolerance of unbelievers. It is not often that you hear a clarion call to choose who you will serve NOW. In fact, there has been a whole religious thrust to reduce the chaffing effect of the word of God. This has proceeded from the wisdom of men.

The new theological jargon is “seeker-friendly.” It is a purely psychological view, with no substantiation in Scripture whatsoever. It does not view seeking as declared in the Word of God, but views someone coming to “church” as a seeker. A gentle atmosphere is sought that takes care not to intrude upon the supposed “seeker.” There is a consequent reduction in edification and the nurture of the saints, which is the sole purpose for believers gathering together (1 Cor 14:26). The appearance, content, and length of the gathering is tailored for those who are NOT in Christ – a most peculiar strategy.

When once the gravity of the situation registers upon the soul, all such efforts will be replaced by Gospel-centered, God-glorifying, saints-edifying efforts. In such an environment, men will be pressed to make up their minds—to choose who they are going to serve. Sinners must be reminded of their real status in order that the Gospel may obtain a good sound to them. As long as they refuse to choose the Lord and obtain His righteousness, they are storing up wrath for themselves. It is not pleasant to consider such a thing. But that is what causes it to have a challenging effect upon the soul. It is the truth—revealed truth.

ONCE AGAIN

Lest I wander too far from the intent of the text, allow me to again remind you of its purpose. We are hearing the Spirit confirm that we NEED the righteousness of God. God will accept NO righteousness that we have achieved on our own. He will ONLY receive the righteousness He gives to men through faith in His Son.

Further, if we tarry to receive that righteousness, wrath is being stored up for us. The wrath of God is AGAINST all of the unrighteousness and ungodliness of men—which is whatever has not come from Him.

The choice before all men is, righteousness from God or wrath from God. There are no other alternatives. The Gospel puts God’s righteousness within our reach. It also provides incentives to seek and appropriate that righteousness. If it is refused, Divine indignation is stored up for that person, and will be poured out on judgment day. There is no good reason for men to continue in sin.

The fact that God is longsuffering does not mean He has forgotten His wrath. Rather than pouring it out upon the wicked immediately, it is being stored up as well as held back.

judgment of God.”

There will be differing measures of that wrath, as seen in this text. Those who have long resisted the Lord will experience larger measures of that wrath and indignation “which shall devour the adversaries” (Heb 10:27). In somber tones the Spirit speaks to those clinging to their own righteousness, and refusing to obtain the righteousness of God. “You are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.”^{NASB}

Just as the truly righteous are laying up for themselves “treasures in heaven,” so the unrighteous are “storing up wrath for” themselves (Matt 6:19). The Lord does not forget the labors of the righteous (Heb 6:10) or the hardness of the wicked. The fact that God is longsuffering does not mean He has forgotten His wrath. Rather than pouring it out upon the wicked immediately, it is being stored up as well as held back.

Jesus spoke of this same condition when describing those who did not believe on Him. “He who does not believe is condemned already . . . he who does not

GOD'S RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENT REVEALED

“^{6b} . . . and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, ⁶who will render to each one according to his deeds: ⁷eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; ⁸but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness; indignation and wrath, ⁹tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek; ¹⁰but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”

The “day of wrath” will be more than a Divine explosion of anger and destruction. That will surely occur, but it will flow from the righteous character of God. It will not be like a mere man losing his temper. A burst of wrath from man confirms he has lost control of himself, but that is not what will happen in the day of God’s wrath. It will be a time when the “righteous judgment” of God will be made known directly, and not by testimony, as it is now.

RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENT

In this world, God gives indications of His “righteous judgment.” It is declared in the Gospel, which announces the judgement of God against sin. When He made Jesus “to be sin for us,” God “condemned sin in the flesh” of His Son (2 Cor 5:21; Rom 8:3). Divine judgment has also been revealed in the descent of men into moral degradation, as they were given over to baser lusts because of their refusal to retain God in their knowledge (1:25-27). The judgment of God was further revealed as men were delivered over to a “reprobate mind” to do things that are not fitting (1:28). In all of these things, God’s judgment was righteous.

But these judgments are only token ones. They are designed to awaken slumbering sinners. Much of the judgment of God is being withheld, lest the race of man be consumed in it.

There is an appointed day, however, when the judgment of God will no longer be restrained, or mingled, as it were, with mercy. It is then that the fulness of Divine judgment will be made known. The absolute correctness of this judgment will also be revealed in a most precise manner. God will be “justified” in all of His sayings, particularly those relating to His judgment (Rom 3:4). No one will be sent to hell unjustly. No person will be gathered to be forever with the Lord unrighteously. There will not be a dissenting voice heard throughout all the universe. That God is impeccably just and righteous will be evident, and the mouths

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of all the ungodly will be stopped.

How frequently the “righteous judgment” of God is declared in Scripture. “He shall judge the world in righteousness . . . He loveth righteousness and judgment . . . He shall judge thy people with righteousness . . . But judgment shall return unto righteousness . . . righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne . . . the righteous judgment of God” (Psa 9:8; 33:5; 72:2; 94:15; 97:2; Thess 1:5).

The heavenly chambers will echo with praise in that day—extolling the righteous judgment of our God. “Thou art righteous, O Lord, which art, and wast, and shalt be, because thou hast judged thus. . . . true and righteous are thy

judgments . . . true and righteous are his judgments” (Rev 16:5,7; 19:2). The righteousness of God’s judgments will be perceived. Then, there will be no sympathy for the ungodly, and no tolerance of their wicked ways. No tears will be shed because of the damnation of the ungodly.

While we are in the world, our hearts seek for the reconciliation of the lost, and we weep over the sin of the sinner. God is longsuffering toward them, and His grace is offered to them. But when the “righteous judgment” of God is unveiled, all of that will abruptly end. The “day of salvation” will conclude, and the “door of hope” will be closed.

ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS

All men will be dealt with in strict accordance with their deeds, or what they have done. This is a consistent proclamation throughout Scripture, and is disruptive to stilted theology. Judgment will be “according to” the works, or deeds, of men. “And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works” (Rev 20:12-13).

Jesus said, “For the Son of man shall come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and then He shall reward every man according to his works” (Matt 16:27). Paul said, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad” (2 Cor 5:10). Of the wicked it is said, “whose end shall be according to their works” (2 Cor 11:15). Of the godly it is declared, “every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labor” (1 Cor 3:8). Our labor is not in vain in the Lord.

The righteous judgment of the Lord is indiscriminating, and based on righteous criteria, by Given O. Blakely

Sowing and Reaping

In the "righteous judgment" of God, the law of sowing and reaping will be brought to fruition. This is a law that begins in this life, and will be culminated in the day of God's wrath and righteous judgment. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting" (Gal 6:7-8). **No person will reap what they have not sown!** Those who have made no investment in their souls, refusing to be "led by the Spirit," will NOT receive eternal life. Those who have followed their own will, rejecting the good and perfect will of God, will not enter into the "everlasting Kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet 1:11). Conversely, those who have lived by faith and walked in the Spirit, will be joyfully received into the presence of the Lord.

A considerable percentage of professed Christians appear to live in complete insensitivity to this fact.

ETERNAL LIFE

"To those who by persistence in doing good **seek** glory, honor and immortality, He will give eternal life."^{NIV} This text sharply conflicts with much theology, and sadly so. The Holy Spirit here associates "eternal life" with "doing good." Many are unable to make such an association. Yet, the Spirit is very precise in His expression. He does not say they are saved because they do good. Rather, **there is an underlying quest that compels these people to do good—and it is that quest that sanctifies their doing.** Further, it is not merely "doing good" that will be rewarded, but "**persistence in doing good,**" or "patient continuance in well doing."^{KJV}

Doing Good

Just what is "doing good?" To some, it may be seen as simply being neighborly, or the avoidance of doing obviously wrong things. But this is not the case, for that kind of behavior is based upon the flesh, and not the Spirit.

Here the Spirit shows us the impact

of "a righteousness from God" upon the individual. Righteousness is not only imputed to us, it is effective in enabling men to live godly. Thus men so energetically engage in the pursuit of eternal life that their whole lives are restructured by that pursuit. "Doing good" refers to being personally involved in the "good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (Rom 12:2). At the lower end, it is doing "good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith" (Gal 6:10). At the high end, it is being perfected by God working within us "in every good work to do His will" (Heb 13:20). In every case, it is personal involvement in the will of the Lord.

There is an appropriate way in which the promises of God are to be sought. This is not only an activity of the mind. It includes the marshaling of all our resources in the quest.

There is an appropriate way in which the promises of God are to be sought. This is not only an activity of the mind. It includes the marshaling of all our resources in the quest. "Doing good" involves the subordination of the flesh, living by faith, and walking in the Spirit.

Seeking for Glory

"Doing good" is not the fundamental thing, but a means to the fundamental thing. In the doing, men are seeking for "glory." The Gospel announces that glory can be obtained because of the satisfactory work of Jesus. The soul that believes that Gospel engages in a fervent pursuit of that glory.

The eternal purpose of God includes the glorification of all who are in the Son. As it is written, "and whom He justified, them He also glorified" (Rom 8:30). The consummate experience of the righteous will occur at the appearing of the Lord. "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory" (Col 3:4). If that does not take place, life has been lived for nothing, and everything has been vanity!

The resurrection of the dead is the occasion when our bodies will be transformed to be like that of our Lord. Thus it is said of the body, "It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory" (1 Cor 15:43). The Spirit also says of this circumstance, "Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself" (Phil 3:21).

Seeking for glory assumes a fundamental discontent with our present situation. We are not discontent with the treasure we have, but with the vessel in which is presently resides (2 Cor 4:7). It is "the flesh" that offends us, for it lusts against the Spirit, competing for our hearts (Gal 5:17). The faithful ever confess, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin" (Rom 7:24-25). Glorification will remove the circumstance of contention. No longer will we find "another law" in our members, "warring against" the law of our mind (Rom 7:23).

Faith moves us to aggressively "seek for glory." It makes us discontent with the wilderness of this world, and a body destined to return to the dust. The Word of God knows nothing of a person in Christ with no interest in "glory." The desire for it is inherent in the new creation. It must not be subdued or ignored, for to do so is to forfeit the prize.

Seeking for Honor

The child of God desires recognition from God. Having been delivered from this "present evil world according to the will of our God and Father" (Gal 1:4), the believer places no value on the accolades of the world. But faith is not content to remain unrecognized or unacknowledged. It seeks for the public recognition of God Almighty. At once you will recognize this is a foreign thought to many professing Christians. However, it is the truth.

Jesus once chided His enemies, "How can you believe, who receive honor from one another, and do not seek the

honor that comes from the only God?² NKJV (John 5:44). On another occasion, the Holy Spirit explains some chief rulers who believed on Him did not, for fear of being put out of the synagogue, confess him. *“For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God”*² NKJV (John 12:43).

In comforting believers, the Spirit refers to the time when God will openly honor the saints. *“Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one’s praise will come from God”*² NKJV (1 Cor 4:5). There are people whom *“the Lord commends”* (2 Cor 10:18). That commendation will be made public on the day of the Lord.

In another poignant saying, Jesus said, *“If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor”*² NKJV (John 12:26). The persuasion of the truth of this promise has a powerful influence upon the soul. It will compel the believer to think, speak, and live in order to obtain recognition from God in the day of Christ. It neutralizes the adverse affects of the world’s rejection, and the failure of even religious peers to appreciate our labors. Though little known, here is a wonderful aspect of salvation and hope: diligently continuing in well doing in anticipation of receiving honor from God.

Seeking for Immortality

The new creation cannot acclimate to death. Life is everything—eternal life. Yet, *“it is appointed unto man once to die”* (Heb 9:27). It is true of every believer, *“but though our outward man perishes, yet the inward man is renewed day by day”* (2 Cor 4:16). The perception of that circumstance produces an intense longing for *“immortality.”*

Immortality is a quality possessed by God alone. As it is written, *“the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords; Who only hath immortality”* (1 Tim 6:16). The promise of immortality is inherent in the Gospel, which brings it to light (2 Tim 1:10).

Immortality will occur for the believer when death is totally eradicated. As it is written, *“For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory”* (1 Cor 15:53-54). This is a state in which no aspect of our persons will diminish or wane in any sense. We will thus be perfect in spirit, soul, and body, conformed to the image of Christ. What a blessed contemplation! Immortality is something for which faith seeks. It is not content with death or the deterioration that is associated with it. Faith can only reside where there is life.

*life through Jesus Christ our Lord*² NKJV (Rom 5:21). Without righteousness, there can be no *“eternal life.”*

The required righteousness, however, does not come from men, but from God. It is not developed by men, but imputed to men. Further, the Spirit has confirmed the universal need of this righteousness.

Now the Spirit has confirmed that the righteousness that is given to us upon the basis of faith, engages us in the pursuit of glory, honor, and immortality. That is imputed righteousness working within us. Whoever consistently sets about to do good, earnestly seeking for glory, honor, and immortality, will be granted the fulness of eternal life. This will be a righteous and true conferment, for all of God’s judgments are righteous.

What can be said of a religion that does not encourage such a quest? What element of goodness can be found in any approach to God that leaves the individual disinterested in seeking for glory, honor, and immortality? Is there any one capable of sound thought that can conclude God will dignify such an approach by granting eternal life? To ponder the question is to answer it.

Men seek immortality by faithful continuance in well doing. Thus, they are not overwhelmed by the hardships of life. Once again, this is not a common perspective in the modern church.

Men seek immortality by faithful continuance in well doing. Thus, they are not overwhelmed by the hardships of life. Once again, this is not a common perspective in the modern church.

Eternal Life and Seeking

We must be careful not to miss the intent of this passage. Humanity has been indicted for NOT seeking after the Lord—for refusing to retain God in their knowledge. Even though all of nature, and their conscience as well, shouted out for men to *“seek the Lord,”* they stopped short of finding Him. Even though God strategically placed man in both location and time so that he might *“seek the Lord”* (Acts 17:26-27), he did not do so.

“Eternal life,” while a gift from God (Rom 6:23), is also the consequence of righteousness. Thus it is written, *“as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal*

INDIGNATION, WRATH, TRIBULATION, AND ANGUISH

*“But to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation. There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil.”*² NASB If we are tempted to think this is simply a theological discourse, designed to assure that we maintain a correct doctrinal statement, we must think again. The total absence of ambiguity, and the absolute sobriety of the text assures us of its criticality. This is not small thought, or something around which elaborate arguments are to be developed.

Without the righteousness of God, men are shut up, or confined, to their own corrupted resources. Because our text has introduced us to a list of despicable sins, men might be tempted to think of sin and rebellion only in terms of gross

immorality and obvious infractions of God's Law. The Spirit thus provides a grand summation of sin so we may understand that it excludes men from the Kingdom of God.

Selfishly Ambitious

The KJV version reads "contentious." That is, the person seeks his own will so aggressively that he contends with everyone who does not feed his self-centeredness. The NRSV and NIV read "self-seeking." This reveals how those without the righteousness of God are primarily interested in themselves, and not the glory of God. The NASB reads "selfishly ambitious." This emphasizes that such people are aggressive to fulfill their own personal interests, which have made no provision for honoring God. In its essence, sin makes the individual self-centered, even though all men are made in the image of God. That is confirmed in the very first sin, when Satan lured Eve into thinking more of herself than of God.

Not Obeying the Truth

Truth, or ultimate reality, is to be obeyed. It is not to be ignored. To fail to obey the truth is to "reject" it^{NIV}, obstinately refusing to yield to its demands. Looking at this matter from a more practical point of view, truth is what God has revealed about Himself and His purpose. The very fact that truth is to be "obeyed" shows it conflicts with the natural will of man. Obeying the truth involves abandoning self-will, and energetically buying the truth, determined not to sell or forfeit it (Prov 23:23).

Obeying Truth the Pictured in Baptism

A classic example of obeying the truth is found in our baptism. In that case, the truth, of doctrine, is the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. Obeying the truth is becoming intimately associated with all of those facts. We are "crucified with Him" (Rom 6:6; Gal 2:20), "buried with Him" (Rom 6:4; Col 2:12) and "raised up" like Him (Rom 6:4; Col 3:1). Much is made of this in Scripture.

Because of being so joined with the truth, baptism is referred to as obeying with the heart the "form of the doctrine" (Rom 6:17). Thus we are brought into

harmony with the truth.

NOT obeying the truth is failing to conform to it. It is refusing to subscribe to its demands and thrusting it away. Bewitched by false teachers, the Galatians regressed into a state where they did "not obey the truth" (Gal 3:1; 5:7). This is a consequence for rejecting the righteousness that comes from God.

Those subjected to the truth of God, regardless of its magnitude, will be held responsible for failing to obey it.

Obeying Unrighteousness

While those refusing to receive the righteousness of God decline to obey the truth, they DO "obey unrighteousness." They reject godly impulses in favor of ungodly ones. They yield to what is NOT right, while rejecting what IS right. In

Those subjected to the truth of God, regardless of its magnitude, will be held responsible for failing to obey it.

fact, they reject the truth in order that they may follow evil.^{NIV}

Jesus described this disobedience in vivid words. "And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved" (John 3:19-20). Second Thessalonians 2:12 refers to this condition as believing "not the truth," but having "pleasure in unrighteousness."

The Reward

What will be the result of those who are "self-seeking," "do not obey the truth," and "obey unrighteousness?" The word is sobering. "Indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil." There are some approaches to preaching and teaching that

do not even allow for such expressions. These are "words . . . which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual" (1 Cor 2:13). It is not possible to ignore or minimize them without suffering the consequences. Candidly, I am persuaded that a significant percentage of professed Christians do not believe these words.

Indignation

Indignation is the boiling over of Divine wrath. It is the venting of the nature of God against those contrary to it. Such indignation is consuming. As it is written, "fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries" (Heb 10:27). This is a passionate and consuming anger.

Wrath

The very word is arresting. This word emphasizes the focus of God's anger against His adversaries. It will be concentrated on "all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men" (Rom 1:18). It is also depicted as coming "upon the children of disobedience" (Eph 5:6; Col; 3:6) whose conduct has been directed by Satan himself.

There is an aspect to this that should jar all men from their complacency. While those in Christ have "not been appointed to wrath" (), Divine wrath does still exist, and believers are to be mindful of it.

God has represented Himself as "willing to show His wrath, and to make His power known" (Rom 9:22). Not only is "wrath" an aspect of God's Person, it cannot be eternally subdued. Eventually, it will be directed toward all who have refused to pursue the knowledge of Him, and have rejected His righteousness.

Tribulation

The wicked will be punished with "tribulation," trouble^{NRSV}, or anguish.^{NIV} If men cannot be persuaded to seek the righteousness that comes from God, let them ponder the outcome of being found without it! Their trouble will begin in this world, and particularly just prior to the coming of the Lord and the consequent passing of the heavens and the earth (2 Pet 3:10-12). They will call for rocks and mountains to fall upon them as they anticipate the "wrath of the Lamb" (Rev 6:15-16). That will only be the beginning of their tribulation.

The greatest of all tribulation will occur when the unrighteous are cast *“into the fire that never shall be quenched: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched”* (Mk 9:44,46,48). Let no person doubt it, *“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God”* (Heb 10:31).

Anguish

Anguish is personal torment. While indignation and wrath come from God, tribulation and anguish are the experiences realized by men through them. There is a hopelessness in *“anguish.”* *“Anguish”* means narrowness

Those supposing obtaining a righteousness from God is not that important, must consider the alternative. Remember, the point of this passage is to confirm our need for the righteousness of God. If men do not avail themselves of it, they will suffer the due penalty for their disobedience.

JEW FIRST, AND ALSO TO THE GREEK

Because the Jews have been given more, more is required of them. They were the first to hear both the Law and the Gospel. The entire ministry of Jesus was spent among them. All of the

the day when the righteous judgment of God is revealed against anything and everything unlike Himself.

GLORY, HONOR, AND PEACE

In order to build the faith and hope of the saints, the Spirit reaffirms, *“but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek”* (v 10). What a marvelous promise, and how essential it is that we hear it often.

Notice the addition of the word *“peace.”* What a precious contemplation that is. In this world saints experienced resistance to working *“what is good.”* The resistance came from within, from the *“flesh”* (Gal 5:17). It came from the devil himself (1 Pet 5:8-9). It also came in the form of persecution, evil speaking, and the general opposition of the ungodly (Matt 5:11-12). The saints of God will eventually be delivered from all opposing influence and struggles, Peace will be given to them that is unequalled. In the ultimate fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy, the Lord will extend *“peace like a river”* (Isa 66:12).

They were the first to hear both the Law and the Gospel. The entire ministry of Jesus was spent among them. All of the prophets testified to them. Thus, the stricter accountability will be required of them.

of place, dire calamity, and extreme affliction. It is when the soul is pressed as in an olive press, and no relief is experienced.

All men suffer *“tribulation”* *“anguish”* to some degree. For the believer, they are experienced only in this world—and even then, only in measure. They not only recover from these times of grief, but are made the better for them. But for the unrighteous, this is not so. When God pours His indignation and wrath upon them, they will never recover, and never realize comfort in any form.

prophets testified to them. Thus, the stricter accountability will be required of them. Revelation is wed to responsibility.

Because the *“Greeks,”* or the most cultured among the Gentiles, are not innocent, indignation, wrath, tribulation, and anguish will come upon them also. There is no respect of persons with God.

Wherever a soul is found that continues doing evil, these judgments will occur. The only alternative to doing evil, is to obtain a righteousness from God. It is the only thing that will stand the test of

Once again, this arrangement is *“to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile.”*^{KJV} Thus both punishment and reward will begin with the Jews. God forbid, therefore, that should imagine they no longer have any recognition in heaven! If they are first in experiencing the power of the Gospel (1:16), first in punishment (2:8-9), and first in reward (2:10), how can they have lost all identity with the Lord? We do well to have *“the mind of Christ”* on this matter. If God so regards them, who is man to despise them? Let us acquiesce with the Lord.

NO PARTIALITY WITH GOD

“1 For there is no partiality with God.” Here is an aspect of God that is repeatedly proclaimed. Moses declared, *“For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe”* (Deut 10:17). King Jehosaphat charged the judges of the land, *“Take heed to what you are doing, for you do not judge for man but for the LORD, who is with you in the judgment.”*

Now therefore, let the fear of the LORD be upon you; take care and do it, for there is no iniquity with the LORD our God, no partiality, nor taking of bribes” (2 Chron 19:6-7). Elihu was right when he said to Job, *“Yet He is not partial to princes, Nor does He regard the rich more than the poor; For they are all the work of His hands”* (Job 34:19). Peter said to the household of Cornelius, *“In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality”*

(Acts 10:34). Speaking of some who had exalted themselves due to their expertise in the Law, Paul said, *“But from those who seemed to be something; whatever they were, it makes no difference to me; God shows personal favoritism to no man; for those who seemed to be something added nothing to me”* (Gal 2:6).

Because God is no respecter of persons, every man will receive according

The righteous judgment of the Lord is indiscriminating, and based on righteous criteria, by Given O. Blakely

to his investments. God will not be mocked. As it is written, *“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life”* (Gal 6:7-8). In somber tones, the Spirit says, *“But he who does wrong will be repaid for what he has done, and there is no partiality”* (Col 3:25).

Peter adds a word on this matter also, confirming that life is to lived in view of this certainty. *“And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one’s work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear”* (1 Pet 1:17).

And what does all of this mean? Why is it emphasized so much? It is because men tend to trust in a profession, or in an outward identity with God. Thus the Jews relied upon what they were called, and made their boast in the Law, which was, as a covenant, given exclusively to them (Rom 2:17). Because that matter is addressed later in this chapter, I will forgo further comments at this time.

While men tend to distinguish themselves from others by their creeds, names, and proper positions, these are not the primary distinctions. To be sure, God will not condone the embrace of a lie, or holding to doctrines that are not true. However, neither will He condone the person or church who is meticulous in doctrine, but fails to grow up into Christ in all things (Eph 4:15). We have the church in Ephesus as an example. *“I know thy works, and thy labor, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: and hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name’s sake hast labored, and hast not fainted. Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love”* (Rev 2:2-4).

THE SEPARATION OF THE RACE

According to the flesh, the sons of men were separated with Israel in mind. Thus it is written, *“When the Most High divided their inheritance to the nations, When He separated the sons of Adam, He set the boundaries of the peoples According to the number of the children of Israel”* (Deut 32:8).

Now, that is a noble distinction. Yet, it did not give the Jews cause to imagine they were not guilty of sin, or did not require a righteousness from God. Jerusalem was destroyed as well as Babylon! David was punished as well as

loving everyone the same. Thus, they affirm, God loves the drunkard as much as He does the fervent servant of the Lord. No such representation is ever given in Scripture. In fact it contradicts what is said about God’s attitude toward people. For example, God referred to David as *“a man after My own heart”* (1 Sam 13:14). He also affirmed *“Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated”* (Rom 9:13). The Lord referred to Abraham as *“My friend”* (Isa 41:8). John was *“the disciple whom Jesus loved”* (John 20:2). God told Israel *“if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people”* (Ex

The blight of spiritual mediocrity and indifference are so common, few people consider them to be of any consequence at all. If such views are acceptable with God, then He a respecter of persons, and does show partiality.

Cain. There is no partiality or respect of persons with God. That is a truth it is to our advantage to grasp more fully.

SOME OBSERVATIONS

Suffice it to say, multitudes of professed believers are conducting their lives as though God DID respect persons. Even though they lack the righteousness of God, they imagine they are received by God because of their position, or the church they attend, or some other imagination. They are not endeavoring to fight the good fight of faith, and thus lay hold on eternal life (1 Tim 6:12). Yet, they imagine they are saved, or at least that they stand a good chance of getting into heaven.

The blight of spiritual mediocrity and indifference are so common, few people consider them to be of any consequence at all. If such views are acceptable with God, then He a respecter of persons, and does show partiality.

Unable to receive this, some affirm that God’s lack of partiality is revealed in

19:5). In Jesus, that kind of preference is brought to its apex. It is said of those in the Son, *“But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people”* (1 Pet 2:9). Do you imagine God loves everyone the same, or that there are none who are favored before Him?

Being no respecter of persons means **God will not violate His character to either accept or reject men.** He will remain true to Himself, for He *“cannot deny Himself”* (2 Tim 2:13). If a non-Jew like Cornelius prays and gives alms out of a good heart, his prayers and alms will come up before God (Acts 10:4). If a disciplined church like Ephesus, noted for testing the false prophets, is found lacking love for Jesus, they will be rebuked and threatened with removal (Rev 2:1-4). There is no respect of persons with God. In confirmation of this, His judgment will *“begin at the house of God”* (1 Pet 4:17). God will not overlook the lack of righteousness—not even among those of His own house!

SIN AND THE LAW

“For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law.”

The Spirit continues to bring home to our hearts the need for a righteousness from

God. He has already shown that human nature is so corrupt it embraces sin eagerly, and does not engage in a continual effort to know God and appropriate His righteousness. All are guilty, none are innocent. All are deserving of judgment and condemnation, and none have attained unto true righteousness. Rest assured, God would

the lake of fire. Rather, it is to confirm their need of a righteousness from God. It is also designed to show us that apart from Divine intervention that righteousness will not be appropriated.

The Gentiles sinned *“without the Law,”* but they did not sin without testimony. They had the witness of both

that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit” (1 Pet 4:6). He is doubtless referring to an earlier statement he made regarding Christ preaching to *“spirits.”* *“For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: by which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison; which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water”* (1 Pet 3:18-20).

Thus, in the judgment of those who had no law, they will not be measured by what they did not obtain. Rather, they will be judged in accordance with what was given to them.

not provide His righteousness for us if we did not stand in need of it.

We will now see that the entrance of the Law did not change the human condition. Neither the Jews nor the Gentiles were deterred by the Law. Sin continued to ravage the race, thereby confirming its need for a righteousness from God.

Remember, God is no respecter of persons, and thus shows no partiality. **Whether sin is committed in the absence of Law, or while one is in possession of it, it still is subject to the wrath of God.**

SINNING WITHOUT THE LAW

Notice, the text does NOT say those sinning *“without law”* will be excused because they received no law from God. Neither, indeed, does it say those who sinned without the law will be judged without the law. Those are contrivances of men that obscure the reasoning of the text. Those who have sinned without the benefit of Divine law will *“perish,”* or be destroyed without it.

The purpose of this text is not to explain why people will be consigned to

nature and their conscience, and both are powerful witnesses. They had to suppress the truth, as meager as it may appear, in order to continue in their sin.

Thus, in the judgment of those who had no law, they will **not** be measured by what they did **not** obtain. Rather, they will be judged in accordance with what was given to them. The Spirit has already shown us that the Gentiles failed to listen to the testimony of nature and their conscience. In so doing, He is removing all excuse for sin from men. He is confirming that there really is no one who, of themselves, is righteous. There is a universal need for righteousness among the Gentiles. Further, they are not innocent in the matter.

I am careful to say that we must not press this text beyond the point being made by the Spirit. Universal condemnation is NOT the point, but universal need—and there is a great difference between the two. As to the eternal status of those who were *“without law,”* that is an arena in which we are not licensed to operate.

Peter informs us that *“the gospel was preached also to those who are dead,*

I realize great controversy rages over these texts. In my judgment, it is far better to take them as they stand, acknowledging they are most profound, extending beyond the perimeter of human knowledge. Believing it will help us refrain from making unwarranted judgments concerning others.

SINNING IN THE LAW

While the Gentiles sinned *“without law,”* the Jews did so *“in the law,”* or under the tutelage of the Law. With all of its meticulous instructions and precise definitions, it could not remove man’s basic tendency to sin. Even with its many threats, it remained powerless to change the human nature. The spirit does not say those who did not sin under the Law will be exonerated by the Law. Sin is again assumed, for the Lord is establishing there is no one who does not need the righteousness of God.

Just as the Gentiles will be held accountable for listening to nature and their conscience, so the Jews will be held accountable for listening to the Law. They will be measured by the very Law in which they made their boast. That law will not support them. They are basically sinful, and the Law cannot pronounce such a person righteous.

NOT HEARERS BUT DOERS ARE JUSTIFIED

“⁴³ . . . for not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified . . .” Here is an appeal to the Law itself,

which possessed a righteousness of its own. Elsewhere it is called *“the righteousness of the law”* (Rom 2:26; 8:4). Such a righteousness is purely idealistic,

and no person actually possesses it. Those who imagine they do are only deceived. Paul referred to this kind of righteousness as a *“mine own righteousness, which is of*

the law” (Phil 3:9). He knew that kind of righteousness would not hold up before the throne of God. It did not depend upon God, but upon men. That is why Paul called it “my own righteousness.”

There is an advantage to hearing the Law, but it is not total advantage. As it is written, “What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision? Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God” (Rom 3:1-2). As our text will show, the Law gave no lasting advantage simply because it was heard or received. The advantage came in the DOING of it.

The Law promised life, or justification, to the doer. “And I gave them my statutes, and showed them my judgments, which if a man do, he shall even live in them” (Ex 20:11). “Ye shall

therefore keep my statutes, and my judgments: which if a man do, he shall live in them: I am the LORD” (Lev 18:5). Nehemiah affirmed this also (Neh 9:29). Ezekiel declared this to be the case (Ezek 20:11,13,21). Jesus announced this principle to a certain lawyer (Lk 10:28). Paul affirms it to the Romans (10:5) and the Galatians (Gal 3:12).

THE DOERS OF THE LAW

This is not a suggestion that such a person exists. Rather, it is affirming what the Law promised. It was a sincere promise, yet one which required more than man could give. The Law had to be done in its entirety, from the ceremonial to the moral requirements. The summation of the Law should have made it apparent that it was never intended to give life. “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your

soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart” (Deut 6:5-6).

With an expertise that can only come through the Spirit, Paul has shown that no member of the human race has qualified for the justification, or life, offered by the law. After all, the Law “is not made for a righteous man” (1 Tim 1:9). That is, it was not a moral yardstick to identify who is really righteous. Instead, it pointed out that no one was righteous, but that all had gone astray. As it is written, “Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin” (Rom 3:19-20).

A WRITING IN THE HEART

“*... for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves,¹⁵ who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them.*” Verses fourteen and fifteen are the conclusion of a parenthetical phrase that began in verse 13. The entire parenthesis (vs 13-15) is an elaboration of verse twelve, “For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law.”

This is spiritual reasoning, necessary because of man’s inclination to justify himself and excuse his sin. The flesh does everything it can to produce a justifiable reason for transgression. However, the

remains in sinners a tendency toward Divine law. Every nation, whether primitive or cultured, has sought to enforce some kind of law. They have developed rewards for keeping this law, and punishment for violating it. While all of the laws do not reflect the truth of God’s law, yet they reflect the “work of the law,” which is to define wrong and provide penalties for its violation.

Even though man has fallen and is the slave of Satan, he still retains a likeness to God. That likeness is found with the thought processes. There remains in sinners a tendency toward Divine law.

All of this is done apart from any Divine coercion, and in spite of the devil’s promotion of lawlessness. It is not the result of education, or social influences that have molded the character of the Gentile world. “By nature” means the described work has resulted from something born in us, as distinguished from something developed through mental disciplines. This natural law is faintly mirrored in the brute creation. The ant, for example, provides food for itself in the summer, and gathers in a harvest, “having no guide, overseer, or ruler” (Prov 6:6-8). Bees know how to build cells and store honey. Beavers know how to cut wood and build dams. All of this is done intuitively, without a written code. It is a testimony to us.

The point is that God has provided all men with a law. Formally, it was written on tables of stone, and given as a covenant to Israel. But it was also given intuitively, blazoned upon the conscience of those who did not receive it upon tables of stone. Now the Apostle takes that matter further. He will confirm the Gentiles are not innocent, even though no covenant of law was made with them. They did receive something.

Spirit will not allow excuses to be given. All men have ignored something in order to sin. With the Gentiles, it was their conscience.

“DOING” BY NATURE

“... for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law.” Even though man has fallen and is the slave of Satan, he still retains a likeness to God. That likeness is found with the thought processes. There

Man, who is a higher creation than the creatures of nature, also possesses intuitive powers. They are of a higher order. Men must learn to build, store, plant, and sow. But when it comes to right and wrong, good and evil, a sense of it remains, even though eroded by iniquity.

In this verse, “*doing*” does not mean fulfilling all of the details of the Law intuitively. Rather it means endeavoring to develop and enforce some moral standard. Thus many, if not all, heathen nations have laws concerning murder, theft, honoring parents, and the like. They also have ways of enforcing those laws, ensuring they are not violated to the detriment of their society. Thus they “*do instinctively what the law requires.*”^{NRSV} They seek to manage human conduct.

The Spirit is not speaking of an exact replica of the law within the human conscience, but only a faint image of it. Just as the Divine image within man has been marred by sin, so the instinctiveness of right and wrong are crude and incomplete. Yet, this circumstance renders men without excuse.

Every Man Enlightened

There is an expression in the Gospel of John that illumines this passage. It speaks of the Lord Jesus coming into the world. Of that entrance it is written, “*That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world.*”^{NKJV} (John 1:9). The phrase of interest is “*which gives light to every man.*” This phrase does not change, whether we read the verse as saying the enlightening One was coming into the world, or everyone that comes into the world is enlightened.

Viewed from the standpoint of our text, this accounts for the Gentiles doing by nature the things contained in the law. A sort of inner illumination was given to them—a remnant of the Divine image which shows the necessity of avoiding evil and doing good. It is not adequate to save a person, but it is sufficient to remove all excuses for sin, and confirm that a righteousness from God is needed.

LAW UNTO THEMSELVES

“... these, although not having the

law, are a law to themselves.” Having no written law is not the same as having NO law. By saying the Gentiles were “*a law unto themselves,*” the Spirit means their intuitive knowledge of right and wrong was to them what the Law of Moses was to Israel.

The Gentiles were just as responsible for living up to their inner law, as the Israelites were for living up to the Law of Moses. Their law was a lesser one, but still needed to be obeyed.

In this passage we learn that men are not as destitute of spiritual knowledge as Satan would have us believe. That condition accounts for the complete rejection of human righteousness, regardless of the level of enlightenment enjoyed. The righteousness of men can never be anything but partial and inconsistent. Both of these traits are unacceptable to God, and will not survive the day of judgment.

The conscience is not a perfect judge, for it can be distorted and fragmentary in its conviction. However, the smallest restraining and compelling power is honored by God.

THE WORK OF THE LAW

“... who show the work of the law written in their hearts.” The “*work of the law*” is the impression of the need for discriminating between good and evil. The work is crude, but the likeness of God’s law is perceived. The worst of societies have known there are things to be suppressed and things to be encouraged.

If you were to take the details of their concepts, they would not agree with the law. Some societies allow for murder, adultery, and other forms of immorality. The “*work of the law*” is seen in the attempt to structure life, identifying good and evil. There is a sense that God “*is,*” and that He should be worshiped and

served. Thus men have created idols and given themselves to the service of what they conceive to be greater than themselves. Technically, they are wrong. Yet their very actions confirm “*the work of the law*” within them. They knew enough to make their sin indefensible.

By saying the work of the law is “*written in their hearts,*” the text means it is part of their nature—born into them by Divine appointment. It is an aspect of the Divine image that men bear.

THEIR CONSCIENCE

“... their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them.” The conscience, one has said, is equal to a thousand witnesses. It is ever present with us, and will not let us go. It can condemn us or approve us. It is like a judge that presides over the lives of men.

The conscience is not a perfect judge, for it can be distorted and fragmentary in its conviction. However, the smallest restraining and compelling power is honored by God. God will hold men accountable for their response to their conscience.

The conscience testifies to the work of the law written upon the heart. It shouts out to men when they do wrong, and commends them when they do good. All of this is highly limited, particularly regarding the Gentiles. Yet, it is sufficient to provoke them to seek the Lord and a better understanding.

THEIR THOUGHTS

By nature, the Gentiles contend with a condemning and approving conscience. In their thoughts men without the true knowledge of God wrestle with a sense of right and wrong. The Divine image within man is marvelously confirmed by this circumstance. The conscience produces thoughts that aggressively condemn wrong, or set about to justify what is conceived to be right.

The worst of men have thought more about good and evil, and right and wrong, than they are willing to admit. We know this is the case, because the Holy Spirit argues that men are inexcusable before

God because of **thoughts** induced by their conscience.

By nature, men call themselves into their own moral court. In it, their conscience testifies to the character of their work. The thoughts of men are like lawyers that plead the case to the conscience. Some thoughts are accusatory, and others argue for the acquittal of the person.

There is no individual who does not

KNOWLEDGE of right and wrong. It is NOT speaking of a will, or basic desire, to do good and avoid evil. That is an important distinction to see. If one doubts this to be the case, ponder that, without exception, *“all have sinned and come short of the glory of God”* (Rom 3:23).

Sin has so corrupted men that they WANT to sin—want to please themselves. This is a dominating desire, and is so strong all men suppress retaining God in their knowledge. That is why they do not

but how to perform what is good I do not find” (Rom 7:18). Alas, this is too hard for some to receive. Within the Christian community there are some who contend this is not true of believers—even though one of the premier believers confessed it.

If the sanctified will cannot perfectly carry out its desires, what of the will that remains under the domination of sin? What power of nature enables the will to prefer good and hate evil? There is no such power in the natural man. If this were not the case, it would not be necessary to be born again (John 3:3-6).

This passage has dealt with knowledge, not will. It has also confirmed the knowledge was suppressed and rejected in preference for personal gratification. This is true of all men, whether they be Jew or Greek.

By nature, men call themselves into their own moral court. In it, their conscience testifies to the character of their work. The thoughts of men are like lawyers that plead the case to the conscience.

contend with this form of inner examination. Some, because of their love for sin, eventually sear the conscience, silencing its voice and thus breaking down the last barrier to deep involvement in sin. But the fact that they had to contend with their conscience, and think about what they did, confirms the work of the law was written upon their heart. How precious is a good conscience!

NOT SPEAKING OF THE WILL

This passage is speaking of the

seek the Lord. That is why the Lord has to *“seek”* them, else they will never be found (Lk 19:10).

Men must guard against the tendency to place too much emphasis upon the will of man. It is not as strong as some have imagined. Even after we have been *“joined to the Lord”* (1 Cor 6:17), our wills cannot fully implement what they desire. As it is written, *“For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me,*

A RIGHTEOUSNESS FROM GOD

Again, the point of these powerful arguments is that men need a righteousness from God. This is the righteousness that is revealed in the Gospel. It is a righteousness that can only be appropriated by faith.

It is man’s Unrighteous condition that compelled him to choose and serve sin. He is fundamentally unrighteous, and stands in need of another righteousness which is not his own (Phil 3:9).

THE DAY GOD WILL JUDGE

“6 . . . in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel.” With the parenthetical statement completed, the Spirit now returns to the thought initiated in verse twelve. The full thought is as follows, *“For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law . . . in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel”* (v. 13,16). That is, the time when those without law and those with law will be judged is *“in the day when God will judge”* all men. This is *“the judgment”* to which all men have been appointed (Heb 9:27), and which no man can avoid.

“The secrets” of reference include the *“thoughts”* mentioned in verse fifteen; i.e., *“their thoughts accusing or else excusing them.”* These were not publicly uttered, but were kept within. Men struggled with their own sins, even though they did not always acknowledge such struggles. Saul of Tarsus was not the last person who found it hard to *“kick against the pricks”* of a goading conscience (Acts 9:5; 26:14). By the grace of God, he was brought out of the condition because he placed a high value on his conscience, always honoring it in accord with the level of his understanding (Acts 22:3-4; 23:1; 24:16; 26:6). He too, in spite of honoring his conscience, needed a righteousness from God.

In the end, in the day of judgment, we will find that no person continuing in sin was truly innocent. We must beware of any tendency to excuse sin, or imagine we have no need of a righteousness from God. If men will be judged for not honoring their untrained conscience, what will be the portion of those who have heard the Gospel of Christ, and have willingly remained in sin?

This is the judgment that will result in *“eternal life”* for those seeking for glory, honor, and immortality. It is also the judgment where *“indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish”* will be passed on every soul of man that does evil” (2:7-9). It is appropriately called

“THE day,” for the day of judgment is always viewed as singular (Matt 10:15; 11:22,24; 12:36; Rom 2:5; 2 Pet 2:9; 3:71 John 4:17; Jude 6).

BY JESUS CHRIST

God is going to judge the world by His Son. That will cast the judgment in the most favorable light, for the Son walked in this world, facing the devil, relying upon God, and tasting of the human experience. Therefore it is written, “Because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead”^{NKJV} (Acts 17:31). It is Jesus who has been “ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead”^{NKJV} (Acts 10:42). The judgment seat belongs to Him. Therefore, “we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad”^{NKJV} (2 Cor 5:10).

This is particularly important. The Gospel is the good news concerning Christ. Inherent in that wonderful message is the availability of a righteousness from God. That

righteousness will carry us through the judgment, passing all Divine scrutiny. However, the day of judgment will be a dreadful day for those who have rejected this righteousness from God, choosing to develop their own imagined righteousness. This is a most serious consideration, to which all men do well to take heed.

Christians are hearing about the day of judgment, the reward of the godly, or the punishment of the ungodly. Where that condition exists, the Gospel is really not being preached.

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The Gospel of Christ is against the backdrop of the conditions described in our text. It assumes universal guilt and helplessness. It also assumes the essentiality of a righteousness from God, and the total unacceptability of a humanly developed righteousness.

ACCORDING TO MY GOSPEL

Paul often refers to the Gospel as his own (i.e., Rom 16:25; 2 Tim 2:8). He does this because it had been committed to him as a stewardship, and he was the custodian of it. He had also entered into it, being himself joined to the Lord and partaking of its benefits.

Why is it that the judgment of the secrets of men is associated with the Gospel? This is a totally foreign thought to many believers. These days, few

helplessness. It also assumes the essentiality of a righteousness from God, and the total unacceptability of a humanly developed righteousness.

The fact of imminent judgment, and the devouring of God’s adversaries bring an urgency to the Gospel that all discerning souls realize. It is all “according to” the Gospel. Those who imagine the Gospel to be simplistic do well to look more closely in it. They will soon behold marvelous things.

CONCLUSION

The gravity of the text reviewed should be apparent to all. Sin has brought a condition upon humanity with wide sweeping affects. Men have been left “inexcusable.” The corrupt human nature has consistently ignored the testimony of nature, the witness of the conscience, and the unmistakable voice of the Law. Even when men knew God, they thrust the knowledge from them. They refused to retain Him in their knowledge. They also ignored their conscience, finding reasons to continue in their sin. Even when given the written law of God, men excused their proclivity to sin and sat in judgment upon those with the same vices as themselves.

Until these things are properly seen, little value will be placed upon “the righteousness of God” that is revealed in the Gospel. As long as men retain the

deluded view that they are good, or that the capacity for goodness remains in them, they will see no need for a righteousness from God.

In salvation, God has not only provided for the needs of men, but for the expression of His own graciousness. Although He owes nothing to any person, He has graciously provided His own righteousness to them, undeserving though they be. His Son assumed all of their liabilities, thereby allowing God to remain righteous in justifying fallen man. That justification includes the complete exoneration from guilt. It also includes the conferment of a righteousness that will stand the test of Divine judgment. Even the revelation of the “secrets of men” will diminish that righteousness. It ought to be clear that this righteousness is indispensable.

I have every confidence that a firm persuasion of a need for righteousness, together with the glorious sound of the Gospel, will produce the right response. However, where the conviction of a need for “the righteousness of God” is lacking, and where the Gospel is not being proclaimed, men are shut up to condemnation. It is a situation from which they cannot extricate themselves. They must both be delivered, and receive righteousness and eternal life as gifts from God. Without these, there simply is no hope.

When we begin to assign values, let the preeminent ones go to God, Christ, the Gospel, and this “great salvation.” Let us place such a high premium upon the righteousness of God that we will not allow an evil heart of unbelief to rob us of its presence and blessing.

Our next Hungry Saints Meeting will be held on Friday, 3/24/2000. Continuing in our studies on Romans, we will cover 2:17-24: **BOTH JEWS AND GENTILES ARE GUILTY.** In a powerful confirmation of the need for a righteousness from God, the Spirit shows that Jews and Gentiles alike are guilty of sin—sin that cannot be tolerated by God. Whether men dealt with God’s Law written upon stones, or upon their own hearts, their nature could not stop them from sinning. Our meeting will convene at 7:00 P.M. You are invited to bring your family and friends for fellowship around the Word of God.

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