

Sermon outline and notes prepared by:

Dr. Stephen Felker, Pastor

[Swift Creek Baptist Church.com](http://SwiftCreekBaptistChurch.com), 18510 Branders Bridge Rd., Colonial Heights, VA 23834

4/13/08

Romans 2:12-16 “No Excuses or Exemptions on Judgment Day”

Intro. My former pastor, Jerry Vines, tells of the time when he was a little boy. The fire station in his town had a goldfish pond. His daddy would take him over there on occasions. He would play around the little pond. He would get down at the pond and he would look down at the goldfish. One of the goldfish would swim close to his side of the pond, and when it would get right close to him, he would stick his finger in the water and try to touch it. Of course, it would see his finger and go scurrying off! He would just laugh because the little goldfish thought it had gotten away from him, but he had his eyes on it all the time!¹

People seem to think that they can escape God. The prophet Jonah thought that. He found out that you can't escape God. And don't think for a minute that you will be able to escape the Judgment of God after death. The Bible clearly teaches that God has appointed a day in which He will judge men by the standard of His own righteousness. This is the same day described in v.5, where he mentions “the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.” The Judge will be Jesus Christ. Jesus Himself affirmed this in John 5:22-23, “For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son, that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father.” When it is time to be called before Him at the Judgment, God will know exactly where you are. You cannot escape; you cannot hide.

Yet some may suppose that certain people will be exempt from facing God's judgment. So the main question I want to answer today is this, “Will anyone be exempt from God's judgment? Will anyone get a pass?” We typically think of the millions who have never even seen a Bible or heard the name of Jesus. Will they get a pass? The Jew is a member of God's chosen people by birth. The Bible and the Messiah came through them. Will they get a pass? If you have gone to church all your life, heard hundreds of sermons, and lived a pretty good life, will *you* get a pass? Many people have idea that the people I have just described will somehow bypass the judgment of God and go to heaven, or at least not go to hell. But is that what the Bible teaches?

Whatever happens at the Judgment, you can be sure that God will do the right thing. Abraham rightly asked in Genesis 18:25, “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” Indeed He shall, for He is righteous. I am going to tell you who will not escape God's judgment & condemnation if they have sinned. What I am about to say is true and just. First of all:

I. THE HEATHEN WILL NOT ESCAPE GOD'S JUDGMENT

I am referring here to Gentiles who do not have the Mosaic law, or any other portion of the Word of God. Nevertheless, Paul says they have sinned, and God holds them accountable for their sin. Paul affirms in v.12, “For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law...” Even though they are “without law”, they still have “sinned” according to Paul. Receiving and hearing the revealed law of God is not the precondition of sin. Solomon said in 1 Kings 8:46, “There is no one who does not sin.” Even though they haven't committed the great

¹ Jerry Vines, *Family Fellowship: An Expository Experience in 1 John* (Dallas: Crescendo Publications, 1976), 239.

sin of rejecting Christ, they still have committed many other sins. And a holy God must punish sin.

Yet many will object saying, “How can God hold them responsible for breaking His moral law when they haven’t even heard of the 10 Commandments?” After all, there are verses right here in Romans that indicate that there is no sin where there is no law (4:15; 5:13; 7:7). Paul answers that question in vv.14-15. Essentially, he is saying that they are not entirely without law. Much of the same moral law of God is made known to them in another way. First, Paul says in v.14, “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.” That sounds a little complicated, but I believe I can explain what he means. The key words here are the words, “by nature.” This is contrasted with what is derived from external sources, such as the written Word of God. You see, mankind was created with an innate knowledge of God’s law. Our natural understanding of God’s principles of right and wrong may be faint, and we may pervert that natural understanding, but it is still there. “The things of the law” must mean certain things which the law prescribes. There are many things found in the law of God that all men seem to know they ought to do, or not do. For example, every culture manifests an understanding that we should worship God. Never did any man bow before a god without thereby acknowledging in some way the law on his heart which tells him to worship God. Several of the 10 Commandments are typically found in human law. For example, the heathen make laws to punish adultery, murder, theft, and bearing false witness. Thus they confess that God’s moral law is written on their hearts to some degree. Mankind recognizes that there is a universal code of ethics. In fact man feels guilt when he violates that very code of ethics within him. He has a definite sense of right and wrong. Furthermore, man can do what is good & right. Obeying & honoring your parents has been required from the earliest days after man was put on this earth. This proves that a law is within him to direct him to what is good. So whether written in stone, on parchment, or in the heart, it is God’s law nevertheless.

Second, the conscience of man bears witness to the universal principle of God’s moral law. Paul says in v.15, “their conscience also bearing witness.” Conscience refers to a person’s inner sense of right and wrong. Normally, the conscience of a person stands guard, ready to raise its voice in opposition to any action that is contrary to natural law, or some other law that we have been taught. Furthermore, in v.15 Paul mentions the role of “their thoughts accusing or else excusing them.” Even the heathen have a sense of right and wrong, and they come to conclusions regarding guilt or innocence. They accuse or else excuse. But all of that presupposes the fact that they know of a law that can be broken. This activity gives proof of moral consciousness. If there were no moral law, there would be no need to accuse or excuse anything.

So the fact that many have never seen or heard the Word of God is no excuse for their sin. They do not get a pass when it is time to call them up for judgment. They will be judged by whatever aspects of God’s moral law they *do* have. They will be judged according to the light they do have.

Now when they are judged, they will be found guilty. The fact is, no one has perfectly kept the moral laws that they know about, and thus all have sinned. All have sinned against their God-given conscience, have they not? Thus, all stand condemned before God even if they have never heard the 10 Commandments or seen a Bible.

Yet the unbeliever who has never heard is not hopelessly condemned. If they live up to the light God has given them, I believe God will reveal to them the way of salvation. That was what Paul implied when he said to the Athenians that God created men & nations “that they

should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us" (Acts 17:27).

This truth concerning the heathen has been the great compulsion for the missionary cause and the driving force that has taken many a man and woman from a life of pleasant ease at home to a life of solitude in the African bush, in a Chinese village, or in some other remote spot of the earth. This is why we support over 5,000 missionaries through the Cooperative Program and the Lottie Moon offering. This is why our church will send a mission team to Argentina next year. Do you care enough about the lost and dying heathen to go, give, and pray for them? They are not going to be exempt from the judgment of God just because they have never heard the Gospel.

Now let's consider who else will not escape the judgment of God:

II. THE SPIRITUALLY PRIVILEGED WILL NOT ESCAPE GOD'S JUDGMENT

We have already discussed the fact that the Jews tended to believe they were exempt from judgment. Paul said in v.3, "And do you think this... that you will escape the judgment of God?" The Jews would tend to think, "We have been the guardians of the law and the agents God has used to reveal the law. We should have the higher honor. We who have possessed the law should be protected from God's wrath." This same kind of thinking was addressed by John the Baptist. In Matt. 3:7 & 9 John said these words even to the Pharisees, "Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?... And do not think to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones." Likewise, Paul warns that the Jews will not be exempt from God's judgment just because they are Jews. He said in the last of v.12, "as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law." The Law will not save the Jew. Instead, the Law will condemn the Jew! Every Jew has knowingly and willfully broken God's law at least to some degree.

Besides, Paul points out that just having the law, or even hearing the law of God is not enough. Paul says in v.13, "for not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified." The good Jew would go to the synagogue service each Sabbath day and hear the reading of the Law, and have it explained to them. He might suppose that surely, he will not be made subject to the judgment of God. But just hearing the law is no way to be justified before God. God also demands obedience. James 1:22 says, "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves."

This text of Scripture also addresses people like you and I who have heard of Jesus. We have heard the Word of God. We have heard the gospel. We have heard the 10 Commandments and many other laws of God. People today might say, "We've been going to church all our lives. We've tried to be religious. We've heard hundreds of sermons and Bible lessons. Surely we will bypass God's judgment!" Paul affirms that it doesn't matter. You may own 10 Bibles and you may hear God's Word every Sunday, but that alone will not make you right with God. Every sermon you hear and every verse of the Bible you read will be used against you if you do not respond to the Word of God with faith, followed by obedience. Furthermore, the test of a true Christian is not how much of the Bible you have heard, but how much of the Bible you obey. If you have been born again, your life will change. There will be a lot of sins that you will give up, and you will begin to do a lot of good works. Would you characterize yourself as a hearer or a doer of God's Word?

Those who ignore Paul's purpose here might think that Paul is teaching a way to be justified before God, namely by doing the law. The Bible does affirm that *if* one keeps the Law

he or she will live (see Lev. 18:5; Deut. 5:32-33; 6:25; Matt. 19:16-17; Rom. 2:6-7, 10). But no one can say that they *always* do the law. If you for one moment think that you are a doer of the law, and that therefore you can be justified by God, you have failed to comprehend something very important. You see, God requires perfect obedience. James 2:10 says, "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all." Gal. 3:10 says, "Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them." Only the doer of the law shall be justified, and there is no man who has ever kept the law except Jesus, so it follows that no one can be justified by his own works. I would not try to get into heaven through judgment of the law. The law was given to convict, not to convert. It proclaims guilt but has no cleansing power.

Now let's consider another truth about the Judgment of God:

III. NO SIN WILL BE OVERLOOKED AT GOD'S JUDGMENT

Not only will no individual bypass the judgment of God, but also no sin will escape His notice. Paul says in v.16 of our text that "God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ." The word translated "secrets" refers to what is hidden or concealed. God is omniscient, and even knows the secrets of men. Nothing is concealed before His all-seeing and all-searching eye. This means that God will judge not only a man's deeds but also his reasons for doing them. These "secrets of men" are not to be restricted to the thoughts and intents and dispositions of the heart. It also includes the deeds that are performed in secret and hid from others. Here Paul is attacking the folly of Jewish externalism. Men know your reputation; God knows your character. Man looks upon the outward appearance; God looks upon the heart. You can keep people from knowing many of the things you have done. And you may even convince yourself that you never did a certain thing. But God knows the secret things; He knows the hidden things. Psalms 44:21 says, "...God ... knows the secrets of the heart." Jesus said, "There is nothing covered that shall not be revealed, and hid, that shall not be known" (Mt. 10:26; Luke 8:17; 12:2). Our innermost secrets may be hidden from human judgment, but they are not hidden from God. He knows the adulterous thoughts that no one else knows. He knows the inner hatred that has yet to be manifest in word or deed. He knows the thoughts of envy or selfish ambition you have. Nothing can be hidden from God.

Do you remember the story of Nebuchadnezzar's dream? He was very troubled by his dream and demanded that the magicians, the astrologers, the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans to not only interpret the dream, but even reveal to him what his dream was! They said, "There is not a man on earth who can tell the king's matter..." (Dan. 2:10). Yet some time later Daniel stood before the king and said, "There is a God in heaven who reveals secrets..." (v.28). Through the prophet Daniel, God not only interpreted Nebuchadnezzar's dream, but he even revealed the dream that Nebuchadnezzar could not remember!

The Day of Judgment is a day in which the mouths of men will be stopped. No man can deny that they have sinned. They stand before a Judge who knows everything, even the secrets of the heart. Furthermore, as we have seen, no man will have any excuse to offer. Even the heathen who has never seen a Bible has nevertheless sinned against God's moral law revealed in nature, in his nation's laws, and in his conscience. I believe this is the real meaning behind Hab. 2:20, "The Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before Him." That verse is not a call to get quiet in church. It is a call to silence those who would make excuses or try to earn their way into heaven. Just keep quiet and admit your guilt before a holy God.

Now because we are all guilty of sin, and without excuse, we see another truth in this text of Scripture:

IV. ALL SINNERS WILL PERISH UPON GOD'S JUDGMENT

What will happen to the person who has sinned, even without having received the revealed law of God? Paul says they shall "perish" (*apollumi*) without the Mosaic Law being used to convict them. This is the same word that is used in John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." Such sinners will spend eternity separated from God in never ending torment. Jesus warned us to "fear Him who is able to destroy [*apollumi*] both soul and body in hell" (Matthew 10:28; cf. Luke 4:34).

Sir Thomas Scott, former President of the British Opera was heard saying upon his death bed, "Until this very moment I thought there was no God, neither Hell. Now I know and feel that both are real, and I am on my way to eternal damnation, the righteous judgment of the Almighty."²

While it is true that every condemned sinner will perish, not all will perish to the same degree and extent of suffering. The less exposure a person has had to the Word of God, the less they will suffer for their sin. Their ruin will be commensurate with their lack of knowledge.

On the other hand, the unsaved person who has known of the law of God will face a more severe judgment. This is also brought out in v.9, "tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first...." There are a number of Scriptures that teach varying degrees of punishment. Luke 12:47-48 says, "And that servant who knew his master's will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required...." (cf. also Mark 12:40).

Jesus pronounced woe on the cities of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum because He performed miracles there and yet they didn't repent. He concluded that the Day of Judgment will be more tolerable for Tyre, Sidon, and even Sodom than for them (Matt. 11:21-24; cf. Luke 10:14). Why? Because those Jewish cities knew much more, so they would bear more responsibility. God is fair. The most severe judgment is reserved for those who know the most yet reject it.

In light of this truth, those who live in the Bible belt of America should be all the more diligent to make sure you are saved. Surely you do not want to stand before Jesus, the Judge of all mankind, & hear Him say, "Depart from me into everlasting destruction." It is not God's will or desire that you perish. Yet Heb. 2:3 warns, "How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation...."

Now I want to conclude my message on a more positive note and share with you one more truth:

V. THERE IS ONE WAY TO ESCAPE GOD'S JUDGMENT

Paul's point in this whole section of Romans is to show that *all* people need a Savior. The Jew needs a Savior. The heathen in the jungle or some other remote region needs a Savior. The whole scheme of redemption presupposes that man is a fallen being, and our sin condemns

² From the *Midnight Call* magazine.

us. Is there any hope? Is there any way out of this predicament? Yes this is! Jesus Christ said in John 14:6, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." The only way to bypass the Judgment Day that I have been speaking about is to confess your sins, and turn from them in repentance. God knows of every sin you have committed. Go ahead & confess them. Then place your faith in Jesus Christ, who died on the cross to pay for every sin you have committed. John 3:18 says, "He who believes in Him is not condemned...." Romans 8:1 says, "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus...." Romans 8:33-34 says, "Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us." If you trust in Christ as Savior, you will get a pass from the Judgment of God that I have been speaking of, for your sins have already been judged at the cross!

Conclusion: There is no excuse that anyone can offer on the Day of Judgment. Ignorance of God's written law is no excuse. Besides, no one in my audience can even try to use that defense. You cannot escape the Day of Judgment unless you settle out of court right now, and believe in Christ as your Savior. I don't want you to perish. See yourself as you really are, caught up in the waves of sin on life's sea. You will surely perish if you do not grab hold of the life preserver that I am throwing out to you. Turn from your sin. Believe in Jesus, and you will be saved.

Sources: Donald Grey Barnhouse, *Expositions of Bible Doctrines Taking the Epistle to the Romans as a Point of Departure*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952); Hershel Hobbs, *Romans: A Verse by Verse Study* (Waco: Word Books, 1977); John MacArthur, Jr., *Without Excuse: Principles of God's Judgment: Study Notes on Romans 2:1-16* (Panorama City, CA: Word of Grace Communications, 1990); Leon McBeth, *Exegetical & Practical Commentary on Romans* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1937); John Murray, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible [CD-ROM]* (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Right: Romans* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1977). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

ABOUT THESE SERMON NOTES

© Dr. Stephen Felker. These notes may be used and even shared for personal study or ministry, but not for commercial purposes. The author credits the sources listed above and footnotes for much of the content. Since Dr. Felker's sermons are generally preached without notes, the "live" recording of this sermon will be more completely in the author's own words. To obtain an audio recording of this message, you may send \$2 for each CD ordered, plus \$2 shipping & handling for each order mailed in. Up to 2 messages come on each CD. Make checks payable to Swift Creek Baptist Church, P.O. Box 235, Colonial Heights, VA 23834. His email address is S+Felker+2@aol.com (remove + signs).