

“God’s Kindness”

Sermons on Romans # 5

Texts: Romans 2:1-16; Psalm 62:1-12

According to Paul, the Gentiles stand condemned before Israel’s God. Even though the Gentiles were not part of God’s covenant with Israel, nevertheless, God reveals himself to everyone through that which has been made so that men and women are without excuse. Through contact with creation (natural revelation), all men and women know that God exists and that he possesses the attributes of deity. But because of human sinfulness, men and women inevitably suppress this knowledge of God in unrighteousness and exchange the truth of God for lie. Failing to give God the thanksgiving and praise he deserves, God gives them over to the consequences of their sins. In Romans 1:18-32, Paul describes this downward spiral of human sinfulness which manifests itself in a number of ways, including homosexuality and the various sins listed in verses 28-32. By the time Paul is finished with his indictment of the Gentiles, no one is left standing. We all stand condemned before Israel’s God. We are guilty as charged.

But Paul is not finished. In fact, beginning in Romans 1:18-32 (our text last time) and continuing on all the way to through Romans 3:20, Paul deals with the sinfulness of both Jew and Gentile. There can be no good news of the gospel without the bad news of human sin. We cannot begin to understand, nor can we begin to appreciate what God has done for us in the person of Jesus Christ, if we do not understand the gravity and consequences of our sin. When Jesus Christ dies upon the cross, he bears in his own body God’s wrath against all of our violations of his holy law. In the message of Christ crucified (the gospel), we see that God is holy and that he must punish every infraction of his law. Either Christ suffers for us and in our place, or we will face the wrath of God ourselves on the day of judgment to which the preaching of the cross even now is pointing us. When the gospel is preached, we have the simultaneous revelation of the free gift of a right standing from God, and the revelation of God’s wrath against sin.

In Romans 1:18-32, Paul offers his very bleak assessment of the status of the Gentiles—that is, those apart from God’s covenant line. But beginning in Romans 2:1 and running to Romans 3:8, Paul reminds the Jews, those who are the biological ancestors of Abraham, that they are not any better off than the Gentiles, and this despite the fact that they have been chosen by God to be the means through which he would give the world the Scriptures and his Messiah.¹

To effectively demonstrate that the Jews are as guilty as the Gentiles, Paul must address a number of themes which serve to expose the self-righteousness of the Jews who regard themselves as exempt from God’s judgment, simply because the Jewish nation had been chosen by God to be the means through which God would bless the world. This is why in verses 1–11 of chapter 2, Paul must first deal with this question of self-righteousness. While the Jews condemn the conduct of the Gentiles (and correctly so), the question must be asked of them, “Do you yourself do the very things you condemn in others?”

Then, in verses 12-16, Paul makes his first mention of the law (the Ten Commandments), while making the point that the knowledge of the law does not in any sense protect one from the judgment of God. In

¹ For a summary of the arguments as to why Paul’s comments in 2:1 ff. are aimed at the Jews, not self-righteous Gentiles, see; Cranfield, Commentary on Romans, I.138-139.

fact, just the opposite is true. The knowledge of the law exposes our sinfulness all the more (cf. Romans 7:7-11). As Paul will go on to say in Romans 2:13, those who know the commandments of God are obligated to obey them. Also, in these verses, Paul will speak of the innate (or natural) knowledge of God, stemming from the fact the law of God is written upon each human heart because we are created in the image of God. Therefore, even though the Gentiles were not part of the history of the covenant of grace, nevertheless they also know God's commandments because these commandments are written upon the human heart and because they are also part of the covenant of works which God makes with all creation. In fact, such a covenant of works is an essential element of the relationship between the creator and his creation.² For all creatures are duly bound to obey their creator as a matter of justice.³

Next, Lord willing, we'll take up the additional subjects of Jewish hypocrisy (vv. 17-24) as well as the Jew's misguided understanding of circumcision (vv. 25-29), before tackling the subject of the true value of those things which God entrusted to Israel in verses 1-8, of chapter 3.⁴

And so we now turn to the first part of our text, the first eleven verses of Romans 2. **A** That Paul is now addressing the Jews and not the Gentiles, is clear from the change in subject in verse 1. *You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things.* Commentators have struggled with how this section is connected to the preceding,⁵ but it seems to me, the connection is rather obvious. Certainly, Paul's Jewish readers would have agreed with every line of criticism which Paul has just raised the against the Gentiles. In fact, you can almost hear the Jewish Christians cheering Paul on as God's indictment of the Gentiles is made clear. The problem is that Paul doesn't stop with the Gentiles! This change in subjects indicates that Paul is addressing Jews.

There are many echoes in Romans 2:1-16 from the Book of Wisdom.⁶ The Wisdom of Solomon, as it is also known, is a Jewish apocryphal book, most likely written before the time of Christ, and with which Paul's Jewish readers were, no doubt, quite familiar.⁷ Because of these allusions (echoes) from the Book of Wisdom throughout this and the preceding section of Romans, it is clear that Paul is referring to the Jews even though they are not explicitly mentioned until verse 12. What is significant about this is that

² Cf. Lee Irons, "Redefining Merit: An Examination of Medieval Presuppositions in Covenant Theology," in Howard Griffith and John R. Muether, Creator, Redeemer, Consummator: A Festschrift for Meredith G. Kline (Jackson, Mississippi: Reformed Academic Press, 2000), pp. 265-267.

³ Cf. *Heidelberg Catechism*, LD 5, Q 12, 13.

⁴ The structure of this section of the epistle is effectively summarized in Cranfield, Commentary on Romans, I.139.

⁵ See Cranfield's review of this debate in, Commentary on Romans, I.140-141.

⁶ As Nygren points out, there are many parallels between Gentile behavior and the Jewish indictment of that behavior in the Book of Wisdom, chapters 13-14. See Nygren, Commentary on Romans, pp. 113 ff; Moo; The Epistle to the Romans, p. 128;

⁷ ISBE, s.v. "Wisdom of Solomon, Book of."

Paul is using the very words that the Jews were using against the Gentiles to make the point that the Jews are doing the very same things they accuse the Gentiles of doing! Therefore, the Jews are every bit as guilty before God as were the Gentiles they were self-righteously condemning.⁸ Thus when the Jews cheer Paul on for exposing the godlessness of Gentiles, they need to be very careful. For God is measuring them with the same standard which they are using to measure the Gentiles. This exposes Jewish hypocrisy to such a degree that Paul can write: “You Jews have no excuse.” For those who judge the Gentiles are doing the very things they condemn in others. The issue throughout this section then, is Jewish hypocrisy. The Jews say one thing but do another.

That is this the case becomes clear in verses 2-3. “*Now we know that God’s judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. 3 So when you, a mere man, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God’s judgment?*” The Jews in Rome, who were self-righteously judging the Gentiles, can only render such judgments based upon external appearances. But God knows all things. He judges not based upon appearances, but upon an absolute and infallible knowledge of the facts. No secrets can be hidden from him. Not only does this mean that there will be a final judgment, but the judge sees all and knows all, unlike sinful men and women who make self-righteous pronouncements against others when they themselves are in no position to judge anyone. Therefore, when men and women pass judgment on others, they bring judgment upon themselves.

In verse 4, Paul now introduces the subject of repentance, when he asks his Jewish reader, “*Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God’s kindness leads you toward repentance?*” It is because the Jew has regarded himself as without sin in this regard, that until now he has seen no need of repentance. Because God is kind, tolerant and patient, anyone who mistakenly thinks that they are above judgment, fails to grasp that God is being kind, tolerant and patient to them. Hence, the Jews end up mocking the kindness, patience and tolerance of God, when they fail to understand that God is demonstrating all of these things toward them.

Many people are confused about the subject of repentance.⁹ Those influenced by revivalism, define repentance as the immediate cessation from certain sins, but this is not correct.¹⁰ Essentially, repentance is a change of mind, specifically about sin. The sinner no longer regards continuing in sin as an attractive option, and sinful acts are viewed as wrong and to be rejected. But along with the negative aspect—the turning from sin—there is also the positive element, the turning to new life in Christ. Repentance, therefore, is not mere sorrow for sin, but a change in direction which results in the forsaking of sin.¹¹ This is why Reformed Christians speak of repentance as a fruit of faith. One who exercises faith in Jesus

⁸ See Nygren, Commentary on Romans, pp. 113 ff; Cranfield, Commentary on Romans, I.141. Cranfield likewise sees the influence of the Book of Wisdom throughout this section, but disagrees with Nygren’s view that this influence is evidence for the fact that Paul’s criticism is limited to Jews only, and not to all men.

⁹ See, for example, Michael Scott Horton, ed. Christ the Lord: A Reformation Response to the Lordship Debate (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1993).

¹⁰ See, for example, Charles Finney, Finney’s Systematic Theology, (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1976), pp. 300-309.

¹¹ Morris, The Epistle to the Romans, pp. 113-114.

Christ and is justified, will also turn away from sin and seek forgiveness and cleansing, things which are part of the process of sanctification.¹² But make no mistake about it, we are not justified by turning away from sin, but through faith in Jesus Christ, who is our righteousness.

It is this failure to repent that brings about the dire consequences now spelled out in verse 5.¹³ *“But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God’s wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed.”* It is because of the same human sin that infects the Gentiles, that the Jews become stubborn (σκληρότητα), a word applied to Israel in Deuteronomy 9:27 (LXX), and which means something like hardness of heart. But the Jews are also unrepentant, a term indicating that they are not sorry for their actions and they refuse to turn away from them. They simply continue on in sin.¹⁴

Because this is the case, the Jews are actually storing up wrath for themselves on the day of judgment. The word translated “storing up,” notes Leon Morris, is “a picturesque word,” and is connected to the idea of storing up treasure for the future.¹⁵ Only this time, there will be no treasure, only wrath. In other words, the hardness of the sinful heart, manifests itself in the failure to repent. And this is why human sin has such grave consequences. If we fail to repent, our guilt only increases every day. Even though the gospel is preached, and we see God’s kindness and patience toward sinners as he pours out his wrath upon his own son to spare his people from that wrath which is to come, those who don’t believe the promise and turn from their sins, are reminded through that same message, how seriously God regards sin—that he will and must punish it. Instead of storing up treasure, those who do not repent are actually storing up God’s wrath for the day of judgment. On that day, God’s righteous judgments will be revealed. For he judges according to truth, not sinful self-righteousness.

In verse 6, Paul sets forth that basic principle which underlies all of God’s dealings with Adam’s race, first manifest in the original covenant of works and then subsequently re-published in the Sinai covenant when God gave Israel his commandments—namely, blessing for obedience to God’s commandments, and curse for disobedience to God’s commandments.¹⁶ Paul will explain and elaborate upon this principle in

¹² Louis Berkhof, Systematic Theology (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1986), pp. 486-487.

¹³ κατὰ here probably has the sense of an adversive conjunction. The following (hardness of heart) stands in contrast with the preceding (repentance). Cf. Morris, Epistle to the Romans, p. 114.

¹⁴ Morris, Epistle to the Romans, pp. 114-115.

¹⁵ Morris, Epistle to the Romans, p. 115.

¹⁶ This distinction between blessing and curse, forms the basis for both the covenant of works, and the Sinitic covenant, and well as the means by which to distinguish between law and gospel. See Meredith Kline, “Covenant Theology Under Attack,” in New Horizons, February, 1994 (page number needed); Cf Meredith Kline, Kingdom Prologue, pp. 86 ff. Thus, when Norman Shepherd writes, “God does not, and never did, relate to his people on the basis of a works/merit principle,” he denies a fundamental principle of Pauline and Reformation theology, as well as undermining any need for Jesus Christ’s active obedience. See Norman Shepherd, The Call of Grace, (Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing, 2000), p. 60.

verses 7-11.¹⁷ But this blessing-curse principle is very clearly stated in verse 6: “*God will give to each person according to what he has done.*”

Paul is citing from Psalm 62:12 (our Old Testament lesson this morning), and now makes clear something which is easy to overlook. This is now a personal matter, and not a collective punishment.¹⁸ God will give to each person, i.e., each one of Paul’s hearers, as individuals, according to what they have done. The idea that Jew and Gentile alike will be judged according to our works is found throughout the Old and New Testaments.¹⁹ There is no escaping the fact that there is a judgment to come, and that we will be judged according to our works. And the standard by which we will be measured is that is written on our hearts and revealed in the Scriptures, i.e., the covenant of works and the Ten Commandments.

Now, of course, the pregnant question remains for Paul’s audience in Rome, “if God will judge us according to our works, what have we done with that which God has given us?” This is especially significant for the Jews in the congregation in light of the fact that God has given them his law, which is the codification in writing of what had previously only been written on the human heart. Thus, Paul indirectly forces the issue: “Have we earned the reward which is promised upon the condition of obedience?” Or “do we deserve the curse which is threatened because we have not been obedient?”

To help his readers answer this question, Paul gets a bit more specific. Those who will receive the blessing are described in verse 7: “*To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life.*” While those who deserve the curse are defined in verse 8. “*But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger.*” The rewards and curses are likewise defined in the next few verses, when in verse 9 Paul writes of those who do evil: “*There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.*” Since the Jew has been given God’s law, they are liable to judgment before the Gentiles, who were not given the law. Likewise, the blessing is spelled out in verse 10: [there is] “*glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.*” Although the Jew has a redemptive historical priority and therefore a greater responsibility, the fact of the matter is that because the covenant of works was made by God with Adam on behalf of the entire human race, this covenant is universal and applies to all men and women, regardless of whether or not they are Jew or Gentile. Paul reminds us of this in verse 11 when he writes, “*God does not show favoritism.*”

It should come as no surprise, that the meaning of these few verses are hotly disputed. Some think that what Paul says here about blessing for obedience and curse for disobedience is simply contradictory to his comments elsewhere about salvation being based upon grace and received through faith (Raisanen, Sanders). Others think this is merely hypothetical, that these conditions would apply were it not for the fact that God is gracious (Lietzmann). There are still others who see the passage as applying to Christians who have already been justified. Although we are saved by Christ’s righteousness,

¹⁷ Moo points out that this passage is a self-contained thought unit arranged as a chiasm. See Moo, The Epistle to the Romans, pp. 135 ff.

¹⁸ Morris, Epistle to the Romans, p. 116.

¹⁹ e.g., Ecclesiastes 12:14; Isaiah 3:10 ff; Jeremiah 17:10; Hosea 12:2; Matthew 7:21; 16:27; 25:31-46; John 5:28 ff; 2 Corinthians 5:10; 11:15b; Galatians 6:7-9; Ephesians 6:8; Colossians 3:24 ff; 2 Timothy 4:14; I Peter 1:17; Revelation 2:23; 20:12 ff 22:12)

nevertheless, we will be judged according to our works as Christians, and that these works mentioned here by Paul are an expression of our faith (Cranfield, Schreiner, Morris), or that this refers to a demonstration of God's power as God makes us into that which he has declared us to be when we were justified—i.e. a new creation (Kasemann).²⁰

But, despite their various degrees of popularity, all of these interpretations fail, miserably. There is no evidence that Paul is contradicting himself, nor is he speaking about a purely hypothetical situation. The problem with the other views—that this applies in some sense to those already justified—is so-self evident, I am surprised that so many miss it. On this interpretation, just how do we quantify the good and evil of which Paul is speaking? When Paul speaks of persistence in doing good so as to gain eternal life, what does he mean by this? Cranfield argues that this expression in the original language must mean something like “a steadfast perseverance in good works.”²¹ But how persistent must I be to gain eternal life? And how is gaining eternal life an expression of faith? How many good works must I do to be rewarded? If this is referring to someone who is justified, how do they gain something (life) which they already have? In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told us that to gain such life, we must be as perfect as his father in heaven is perfect (Matthew 5:48; cf. I Peter 1:15). This sets the bar pretty high. That Paul is here talking about the new obedience of a Christian, clearly doesn't fit the context. No, Paul has been speaking about the condemnation of Jew and Gentile.

Furthermore, the converse of this also becomes an issue because blessing is not the only thing at stake. What about the curse? How many times must I reject the truth, or how many times do I have to give into evil desires, to receive the curse? This misguided interpretation of Paul's blessing/curse principle, not only raises difficult pastoral questions, it certainly doesn't fit with what follows in the next few verses, nor in the rest of the epistle. And wasn't the problem with the Jews to whom Paul was writing the fact that they were under the mistaken impression that they had persisted in good works and avoided the evils of the Gentiles? This very attitude comes from a hard and unrepentant heart, Paul says, and explains why God's wrath is being stored up against them, lest they repent!

The best interpretation of these verses, then, is the one which simply takes Paul's comments at face value. God rewards obedience to his commandments and he curses those who disobey them. God will give to everybody according to what they have done.²² Because of this, the critical question will not go away. “Who among us has persisted in doing good as we should?” The answer is no one. “Who among us has disobeyed the truth and followed evil?” The answer is everyone! But Paul's whole point from Romans 3:21 on, is that God will bless us with eternal life nevertheless, because there is one who did

²⁰ See the summaries of different interpretations in: Morris, The Epistle to the Romans, pp. 147-149; and Moo, The Epistle to the Romans, pp. 139-143.

²¹ Cranfield, Commentary on Romans, I.147.

²² Hodge, Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, pp. 49 ff; Moo, The Epistle to the Romans, pp. 136-143; Contra Cranfield (Commentary on Romans, I.153), who writes, “it is absolutely vital to the true understanding of these verses to recognize that the statement of v. 6 is not made in a legalistic sense—it is not an assertion of requital according to *deserts*—and that it is implied in vv. 7 and 10 that the people referred to *earn* eternal life.” According to Cranfield, good works are the expression of faith and repentance, and do not obligate God. This, it seems to me, widely misses the mark for the reasons indicated above.

fulfill the demands of the covenant of works and who has obeyed Ten Commandments and earned God's blessing. There is one who avoided all evil every minute of his life. In fact, beginning in Romans 3:21, Paul will tell us just how it is that God saves sinful Jews and Gentiles when none of them have earned the reward and when all of them deserve the curse. The answer cannot be found in our obedience—even in the new obedience which springs from our union with Christ. It must be found in the righteousness of God, which is revealed as a free gift to all who believe in Jesus Christ, through the preaching of the gospel. In the gospel, God freely gives us what he demands of us under the law! This distinction between the law and the gospel, so clearly set forth in verses 7 and 10, is hardly an invention of Martin Luther. It is a distinction made by the apostle Paul.²³

In verses 12-16, we come to a new paragraph and a new subset in Paul's overall indictment of the Jews in which Paul, for the first time, mentions the law so as to make the point that the mere knowledge of the law does not render one safe from the judgment of God.

Verse 12 is linked to verse 11, as an explanation of the fact that God does not show favoritism.²⁴ For (γὰρ) *"All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law."* In keeping with the distinction made throughout the preceding, those apart from the law are obviously the Gentiles, while those under the law are the Jews. Whenever Paul uses the term νόμος (law) in the Book of Romans, I take him to mean the Ten Commandments.²⁵ Therefore, even though the Gentiles were never part of God's covenant with Israel, they are regarded as sinners nonetheless. Paul will tell us why in verses 14-15. But Israel, which was given the law, will be judged by that law. Suffice to say, the failure of Jew and Gentile to obey the commandments of God written upon both the heart and two tablets of stone, is the reason why both Jew and Gentile currently find themselves under God's judgment.

That the judgment of Jew and Gentiles takes place according to the blessing and curse principle set out in verse 6, is now made plain in verse 13. *"For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous."* Paul cannot get any clearer—those who obey the law will be declared righteous. Those who do not obey it will not be declared righteous. Paul will refer back to this very point at the end of his treatment of human sinfulness, when he writes in Romans 3:9-12, *"We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin. 10 As it is written: 'There is no one righteous, not even one; 11 there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. 12 All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.'"*

From these comments in Romans 3, when Paul is summarizing his indictment of both Jew and Gentile, it is clear that he believes that no one (either Jew or Gentile) has obeyed the law, so as to be justified or gain eternal life. In these verses, then, Paul cannot be talking about "the beginning of a grateful obedience" from someone who looks to God in faith, as one otherwise clear-headed commentator tries to

²³ Moo, [The Epistle to the Romans](#), p. 142.

²⁴ Moo, [The Epistle to the Romans](#), p. 144.

²⁵ See Moo, [The Epistle to the Romans](#), pp. 145-146, especially footnote 7. Also, Cranfield, [Commentary on Romans](#), I.154.

argue.²⁶ Paul is stating as clearly as he can that those who obey God's law will be declared righteous, and those who do not, won't. Therefore, in order for anyone to receive a right standing before God, they must be obedient to the law of God. There is no sliding scale here. You are either obey God's commands or else you perish. As our dear friend Rod Rosenblatt puts it, God will not grade the final exam for eternal life on a curve. This is why Paul's thesis statement in Romans 1:16-17 is such glorious news. In the gospel, God freely offers a right-standing to sinners who deserve to be punished, because they haven't done good! Indeed, Paul has just told us that when we measure ourselves by God's standard of measurement—the law—we cannot be justified (cf. Romans 3:20). For who of us has done good so as to earn the blessing of life? Paul says "no one." Who of us have avoided doing evil so as to avoid the curse of death? Paul says "no one." All have turned away. Together (Jew and Gentile) we are worthless.

But what about the Gentiles who do not have the law? As we just mentioned, Paul deals with their particular situation in verses 14-15. *"Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, 15 since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them."* If the Gentiles were not part of Old Testament covenant history and do not know God's commandments (not that they are "lawless"),²⁷ how is it that they do by nature things required by the law? Paul has just told us that from contact with creation, all people know that God is, that he possesses certain divine attributes, a knowledge which the Gentiles attempt to suppress, but are never fully able to do so. Thus, the Gentiles gain some measure of God's will from the light of nature.

Furthermore, Paul tells us that these things, i.e., the requirements of God's law are written upon the human heart so that the conscience bears witness to the things of God. This is certainly part of what it means to be created in God's image. While some argue that this is a reference to the prophecy of Jeremiah 31:31-34, wherein the New Covenant, God will write his law in our hearts, the context here indicates that Paul is speaking of Gentiles who are under God's condemnation and curse, not his blessing.²⁸ That which is written on such hearts must refer to the terms of the covenant of works. The conscience should here be understood to refer to the sense of right and wrong derived from God's self-revelation, and not from the sinful darkness of the autonomous human heart, which rejects God's revelation and exchanges it for a lie.²⁹ If our conscience is our guide it will guide us directly to Hell, because it is sinful and self-centered, hates the truth and loves the lie.

Paul is making the point that because the Gentiles, like the Jews, are created in God's image, and because as creatures, they are placed under the covenant of works as a matter of divine justice, and because they are in continually contact with the general revelation of God in nature, despite not having the law, the Gentiles generally know that theft, murder and adultery are wrong, and that obeying parents, loving your spouse and children, and telling the truth about your neighbor are good things. As informed by general

²⁶ Cranfield, Commentary on Romans, I.155.

²⁷ Moo, The Epistle to the Romans, p. 149.

²⁸ Contra Cranfield, who states "on the assumption that the Gentiles referred to are Christians," they have an earnest desire to obey God's law (cf. Commentary on Romans, I.157-158).

²⁹ Morris, Epistle to the Romans, p. 126.

revelation and because of the image of God, there are times when the Gentile's conscience accuses him when he does wrong, and times when it rejects the charges. It is because these things are true, that at the end of the day, the Gentile is every bit as guilty before God as is the Jew, even though the Gentile never knew the Ten Commandments. Like the Jew, the Gentile must obey the law written on his heart and revealed to him in nature in order to be justified, and like the Jew, he too, has turned away and done evil. No one has done good, Jew or Gentile.

And so Paul can state in verse 16, *"This will take place on the day when God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares."* In other words, because the Gentiles have the law written upon their hearts, on the day of judgment their consciences will accuse them when they stand before God when their secrets are exposed. The connection between judgment and the good news of the gospel, has troubled many. But as we have seen, if the preaching of the gospel is the simultaneous revelation of a righteousness from God, as well as his wrath, this is perfectly understandable. The gospel declares what God must do to save sinners, as well as making plain that God must punish all sin. This is probably Paul's meaning here. Through the preaching of the gospel, the Gentile has seen how seriously God regards all violations of his righteous commands, even though all the Gentile knows is the law of God written upon his heart. This means that on the day of judgment, when his secrets are exposed, the Gentile's conscience will bear witness and concur that God's verdict about him is just and right. He knows he is guilty!

What then should we take with us from this passage?

As Paul made perfectly clear in Romans 1:18-32, the Gentiles stand condemned before a holy God. Despite the fact that God has revealed himself to all through that which has been made, the Gentiles have attempted to suppress the truth of God through their unrighteous acts. They have exchanged the truth of God for a lie. Because of this, God gives them over to the consequences of their sin, described by Paul as a downward spiral into deeper and deeper depths of depravity.

But in Romans 2:1-16, Paul turns his focus to the Jews. Despite the fact that God has given them the law, the Jews are self-righteously judging the conduct of the Gentiles, even though the Jews are doing the very same things they are accusing the Gentiles of doing. This leads Paul to affirm one of the main principles of Holy Scripture. God blesses those who obey him, while he curses those who disobey him. Since all have disobeyed, this means that neither Jew nor Gentile can stand before him in the judgment and claim a righteous standing. If God gives them what they deserve, they will perish. They will not be justified.

But Paul has also spoken of God's kindness, which leads us to repentance for all of those times we have self-righteously looked down on someone else. Not one of us have done good and avoided evil. We have not earned a right-standing, nor eternal life. We all deserve God's judgment. Therefore, who are we to condemn others? This is why God hates self-righteousness, whether it be found among Jews who were self-righteously looking down upon the Gentiles, while doing the very same things themselves, or among Christians, who look down their noses at "bad people," all the while forgetting that it was the same patience and kindness of God which he is showing to these sinners, which at one time led us to repentance. Self-righteousness in all its forms is sin and we must repent of it.

Indeed, God's kindness, spoken of Paul elsewhere in terms of his grace and mercy, lies behind the fact that God sent Jesus Christ to earth to fulfill the terms of the covenant of works and obey the law of God, perfectly. Therefore, make no mistake about it, we are saved by good works. The key question is,

“whose works?” Jesus Christ does good and earns life. He doesn’t do evil, although he receives the curse for sin, only because the guilt of our sins is imputed to him. And it is because *his* is the righteousness from God, revealed whenever the gospel is preached, we have faith and life, and need never fear that day of judgment yet to come. Beloved, Jesus Christ is our true blessing from God, because he has taken away the curse! And through faith in him, God sees us as perfectly obedient to his commandments, and as having fulfilled all of the demands of the covenant of works. This, is why the gospel is the power of God for all who believe! And it is God’s kindness which leads us to the Savior he has provided for us.

Let us pray . . .