



**BELIEVERS CHAPEL**

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Romans 2:1-16

"The Judgment of God"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] We're turning to the second chapter of Paul's letter to the Romans and reading for our Scripture reading this morning verse 1 through verse 16; Romans chapter 2, verse 1 through verse 16,

"Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things. But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against them which commit such things. And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them who do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God? Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; who will render to every man according to his deeds: to them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life: but unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Greek; but glory, honor, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also

to the Greek: for there is no respect of persons with God. 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; (For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified. For when the Gentiles, who have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: who shew the work of the law written in their hearts”—

(And may I stop here for just a moment and point out that what Paul is saying is simply this, that men are going to be judged by the light that they possess. For those who have the law, they shall be judged the law, the Law of Moses. But for those Gentiles who do not have the law, for the law was not given to them, they shall be judged by that work of the law written in their hearts. And that is evidenced, we might add here, this is what I wish to say, the fact that in many of our Gentile societies all over the world, various sins spoken of in Scripture are proscribed. In many, for example, of the Moslem lands we have adultery proscribed. That is an evidence of the work of the law written in the hearts. Human government itself is an evidence of that. So that what Paul is saying is simply that those with the Mosaic law shall be judged by that law. Those who do not have that law shall not think thereby that they are able to escape judgment. Written in their hearts, because they are created by God and the image of God has left its imprint upon them, they too have a moral law written within. They show the work of the law written in their hearts. And then, in addition, he says they have something else. They have conscience; an inward monitor granted by God. And the remainder of verse 15 continues),

“Their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or even excusing one another; (I confess that I smile every time I read that last word or two of verse 15 because the little words rendered in the Authorized Version "or else" excusing one another probably should be rendered "or even" excusing one another, in this instance. And what Paul is saying is that generally speaking, our conscience accuses us. But it is possible upon occasion that the conscience shall

excuse us. But, the very way in which the apostle writes it indicates that most of the time, the conscience accuses us, but upon that rare occasion, it might actually excuse us for actions that we may have done. And the parenthesis closes; the one that began in verse 13, with the end of verse 15 and we are therefore to connect verse 16 with verse 12. And Paul says): In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel."

Those last words, incidentally, do not introduce a new principle of judgment as, for example, the footnote in the Scofield Edition of the King James Version suggests. But, rather say that this fact that God is going to judge righteously is something that the apostle preaches wherever he goes. It's according to my gospel. That is, according to the gospel that I am preaching. May the Lord bless this reading of his word.

[Prayer removed from audio]

[Message] You know, in the ministry of the word in Believers Chapel, we often make reference to the doctrines of Calvinism and also the teachings of Arminianism. And we refer to the historical controversy between these two parties over the doctrine of salvation. We tend to think of Arminianism as primarily found within the tradition of the Wesleys. Strictly speaking, Arminianism is of a double character. There is a rationalistic form of Arminian teaching, which has persisted to the present day that is unchristian. But in the case of Wesleyan Arminianism, it is generally evangelical and particularly as set forth by the Wesleys themselves. And it has been the opinion of many, of course, that Arminianism and even the theology of the Wesleys is contrary to the teaching of the word of God.

As a Calvinist, naturally, I would be somewhat critical of certain doctrines of Arminianism, but you will notice in this hymn that we have just sung, written by Charles Wesley that there is a great deal of harmony with the things that we say in Believers Chapel constantly all of the teachers who

teach here. You'll notice a great stress upon the fact that salvation does not begin with man, but actually begins with God. There are, I think, occasions in which our true theology shines out, in spite of what we might say, when we reason about our faith.

Calvinists often say when you get down on your knees and pray that God may do this and may do that and may accomplish this particular purpose. You are actually acting like a Calvinist because you're asking him to overrule in the affairs of men. That is exactly what one who believes in the sovereignty of God understands by that term. Those who believe in the doctrine of freewill, however, believe that the essence of our relationship to the Lord rests in a free decision not brought about by any pressure from anyone, but simply from within. That is what we think of when we think of Arminian teaching. That is, that our salvation is related to a decision of the freewill. Now Calvinists believe that the will acts when we are saved. It's simply that Calvinists believe that it is God who moves the will to make that decision to receive the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior or to respond to the gospel message.

Now if you'll notice, Mr. Wesley here speaks in the same language. In the third stanza we read, "Now incline me to repent." Notice, "Incline me to repent." "Let me now my sins lament, now my foul revolt deplore, Weep, believe, and sin no more." The second stanza, "I have long withstood his grace, long provoked him to his face, would not hearken to his calls, grieved him by a thousand falls." So incline me to repent is exactly what we're saying. We're saying that we do not repent unless he does incline us to repent. So how does it feel to be singing a Calvinistic hymn written by Charles Wesley [Laughter] this morning?

I have a good friend. He's Dr. James Packer. He's given us a promise he'll come to the Chapel one of these days and Dr. Packer has made a rather intensive study of a number of these particular things and it's his contention that the Wesleys were really simply confused Calvinists [Laughter]. That they really did believe in the truths that we've been talking about and they do emerge in their hymns. But, at the same time, when they reasoned about the faith, they reasoned in an Arminian way. Well, I call that to your attention because it does indicate that in the case of some

of our friends who are Arminians and believers, there's not really that much difference between us in our theological views; those evangelical Arminians.

Now our subject for this morning is, "The Judgment of God." The reality and the inescapability of the judgment of God are elementary truths of the Bible. Cain's whining complaint, "My punishment is too great to bear" is illustration of the reality of the divine judgment. Moses' admonition to the children of Israel, "Be sure that your sin will find you out" is also evidence of the reality and the inescapability of the judgment of God. It has been said that there are four possible escapes from human judgment. In the first place, it's possible that a man's offense might not become known. He may really be guilty of a crime, but if he alone knows about it, he is able to escape judgment. Then there's always a chance that the guilty person may escape the boundaries of the place in which his crime is guilty and, thus, escape human judgment. It's also possible that after apprehension by the authorities, he may somehow or another experience the results of a breakdown of human justice and, therefore, escape the ultimate judgment. And, finally, even after judgment has been pronounced and he's been committed to an institution, it is possible to escape from such a place of detention and live in a measure of freedom.

These four possible escapes from human judgment do not, however, apply with reference to divine judgment. There is no way to escape. For example, it is impossible that one's crime shall be unknown to God, for the Bible says concerning him, "Thou dost scrutinize my path and my lying down, and art intimately acquainted with all my ways." It's not possible to escape into a territory beyond his jurisdiction like a man who commits crime in America and escapes across the border to Canada or to Mexico. Because that same Psalm says concerning our God, "Where can I go from Thy Spirit? Or where can I flee from Thy presence?" We are hopelessly bound up within his own territory.

It is also impossible for us to experience any breakdown in the legal processes because the Scripture says concerning him that "all his ways are just." And once we are under his judgment, once we are detained as guilty, it is impossible for us to escape him because, as the Psalmists have said,

"He's intimately acquainted with all of our ways. We cannot possibly escape from him." We often used to see, at least when I was growing up, signs by the side of the road, "Prepare to Meet Thy God." Those are very justifiable signs. Not only are they signs in which we have an express citation from Amos chapter 4, but they express the reality and inescapability of God's judgment.

Dr. Barnhouse, in one of his messages, comments upon the fact that as a young child, he heard a message on divine judgment and the evangelist preached on the text, "Prepare to Meet Thy God." He said he remembered one line of his sermon; although, he could not remember the name of the preacher, which had never left him. And the line of that sermon that had never left him was, "The greatest reason you should prepare to meet your God is because you must meet your God." That, of course, is true. Amos who says, "Prepare to meet thy God" says "The lion hath roared and who will not be afraid?" And so, God has spoken and he has spoken as judge and he has warned us that we must ultimately appear before him in judgment. Those who do not know the Lord Jesus Christ have a judgment before which they shall appear. Those who know the Lord Jesus Christ also shall face judgment. In other words, every single one of us, every single one in this auditorium this morning shall one day stand before God. You may stand before him as a lost man and suffer the ultimate penalty of eternal punishment or as a Christian and have your works judged by him, but the judgment of God is inescapable.

Now when we speak of the judgment of God or the justice of God, theologians usually see three aspects of it. There is rectoral justice. That is, the rectitude with which God rules both the good and evil among humanity. It is his execution of divine government. It is probably referred to in chapter 1 and verse 32, rectoral justice. Then the Bible also speaks of distributive justice. That is, the rectitude with which God executes the law. He gives rewards upon certain basis and he gives also penalties upon certain basis. In chapter 2, verse 6 of this Epistle to the Romans, we read, "Who will render to every man according to his deeds." That expresses the distributive justice of God.

Now there are two aspects to this particular type of justice. One is relative, for a reward is something that we never really earn, but the penalties that are meted out to us are absolute penalties

which we fully earn. But, nevertheless, there is distributive justice and that is the primary thing about which Paul speaks in the 16 verses that we want to look at this morning. The Bible also speaks of redemptive justice and redemptive justice is the justification which God accomplishes through the justification of the ungodly individuals. In chapter 3 of the Epistle to the Romans, we shall read of that particularly in great detail. In chapter 4 and verse 5, Paul will say, "But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted to him for righteousness." There the apostle speaks about the work of God in justifying or declaring righteous the ungodly. That is redemptive justice. *Iustitia evangelica*, the theologians have often called it, that is redemptive justice.

We shall talk about that, I say, later on. But in the 2nd chapter, we're dealing with distributive justice and it is directed in the 2nd chapter to the pious, religious hypocrite who's listened to the Apostle Paul speak about the sin of men in chapter 1 of the Epistle to the Romans. And he stands by the shoulder of the apostle and he vociferously agrees with Paul. You can hear him saying, "Amen, Amen" as the apostle has set forth the sin of the Gentiles. That always reminds me of the story of the snuff dipper in the rural church many years ago. And the preacher waxed a little eloquent this morning and he said, "God is going to judge the idolaters," and he shouted out, "Amen!" And then the preacher, encouraged by that "Amen!" and said, "And God is also going to judge the adulterers," and he said, "Amen!" And, finally, the preacher said, "And God is going to judge the snuff dippers," [Laughter] and he was heard to mutter very lowly and under his breath, "Now he's done stopped preachin' and gone to meddlin'!" [Laughter]

Well, the Jewish man might have replied in a somewhat similar fashion because listening to the Apostle Paul, he could agree with everything that Paul has said. The apostle has spoken about the sin and unrighteousness of men. He's spoken about the revelation of the wrath of God. These are things that all Jewish men believed in and he has spoken, too, about those who know the judgment of God that they who commit such things are worthy of death. Not only do the same but have pleasure in them that do them and he has said "Amen!" to that. What he has done, in effect, is

to agree with what the Bible teaches, but he has not applied it to himself. And so, the apostle now in chapter 2, verse 1 through chapter 3 and verse 8 will deal with the pious religious hypocrite.

It is clear that he has the Jewish man in mind because he identifies him in verse 17, "But if thou (Notice the "thou," the same "thou" that we begin chapter 2, "If thou") art called a Jew and retest in the law, and makest thy boast in God." So he is thinking about the Jewish man, but he has not yet identified him. But now, the tendency of human nature is once one makes this statement is to do exactly what the Jewish person did. To say, "Yes, he does have the Jew in mind and, therefore, he doesn't have us in mind." But it is the same principle that we see needing application in the evangelical church today, because there are many people who sit in a congregation like this congregation that has had generally orthodox teaching through the years, and to affirm the truth of what is going forth from the pulpit, but not really to apply it to ourselves. So the apostle now will do what every teacher of the word of God must try to do, but which can only ultimately be done by the Holy Spirit of God. He would like to see the listeners respond by applying the truth not simply to others, but also to themselves. So for the entirety of chapter 2 and the first eight verses of chapter 3, Paul will set forth the guilt of the Jew.

Now he does it in a very difficult kind of way and I know that it is hard to follow some of the apostle's language. I suggest that you read this over and over again. The general thrust is very plain, but as far as the details are concerned, it's not so easy. The apostle uses the method of the Stoic diatribe. Now the Stoic diatribe was a well-known way of teaching truth. It was characterized often by direct address and we have that here in chapter 2, verse 1 "Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man." It was characterized by the use of the vocative and it was also characterized by the use of questions.

And you can sense this as you read chapter 3, verse 1, after Paul has set forth the guilt of the Jew rather thoroughly. He then asks the natural question that a Jew would ask, "What advantage then does the Jew have?" or "What profit is there of circumcision?" Because he knew the Old Testament did teach that the Jews had certain advantages and that circumcision was a profit. The

apostle doesn't question that there is profit even at the present time for the Jewish man. So he brought that up and set it out as a rhetorical question and gives the answer. I think the apostle learned that because he often preached on the street corners of the Ancient Orient and in those particular environments, it was the custom for people to engage in a great deal of heckling of speakers. I presume it's like someone who stands up in Hyde Park or in some of the other places of our western world and proclaims a message. There might be some heckler in the audience who seeks to embarrass the speaker. Paul had been embarrassed probably many times or men had sought to embarrass him many times. He knew exactly the kinds of questions that they would be offering. And so, he anticipates them and sets them out. We'll see through the Epistle to the Romans that he often uses that methodology.

Many years ago, I used to teach home Bible classes in Dallas. Well, did for many years about twenty years. Sometimes would have two or three a week and I noticed over the years that certain questions appear at certain times. I could almost tell exactly the lesson at which someone would say, "Well, what about the heathen?" or then "Well, if God is sovereign, what about human responsibility?" and so on. These questions are questions that occur so frequently among human beings that they may be anticipated. And so, the apostle uses that type of methodology. But now, we do need a help to understand what is transpiring here in chapter 2 through the 8th verse of chapter 3 and I, perhaps, can illustrate this by referring again to something with which most of you in this room are familiar. Probably most of you in this room have been to Italy and you, in the course of your travels to Italy, you have been brought down into the catacombs. Now there are many catacombs around the city of Rome, as you know, and you can go down into the catacombs and finally become very confused. You have a guide and naturally you can get out easily, but in ancient times, there were no tourist guides. And so, if you went down into the catacombs, it was necessary in some of them to have some help. And so, they would give you a thread and you would take this thread down into the catacombs where they would have meetings. And by the use of the thread, you were able to make your way out.

Now there is a little thread in the Epistle to the Romans here in this part of the apostle's exposition that will help you to understand what he is trying to do. And if you will keep this before you, you will understand and it's chapter 3 and verse 9. For the apostle, as he concludes, tells us what he has been doing. He says, "What then? Are we (That is, we Jews) better than they? No; in no way; for we have before charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin." So since we've had the Gentile charged as being under sin in chapter 1 and the Jew as being under sin in chapter 2, we are to look at this chapter in the light of Paul's overall purpose. He's trying to prove that the Jewish man is like the Gentile man under sin.

Now he's going to set forth the principles of divine judgment to begin with. Then he will make the application to the Jew in verse 17 through verse 29 and answer the natural objection, "What's the advantage of being a Jew then?" in chapter 3, verse 1 through verse 8. That's very simple, but the details sometimes can be a little confusing. And so, if you go out and find it a little confusing, well, you're probably having the experience that most students of the Epistle to the Romans have had. It's not that Paul is not clear, but it does require some concentration and meditation. Now the apostle begins then his section on the guilt of the Jew by reminding them of the principles of divine judgment. God judges according to reality, he will point out in the first 4 verses. God judges according to works, he will point out in verse 5 through verse 11. And he will conclude the section by pointing out that God judges impartially. So he judges according to reality. He judges according to works. He judges impartially.

Now in the Scofield Bible, we have a little note under verse 16 or under verse 2, it's found, suggesting that there is a fourth principle of judgment and that is according to the gospel. That, of course, would be contrary to the context of chapter 2 and that comment was due to the fact that in the English translation, one might get that impression, because Paul does say in verse 16 in the English translation, "In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel." That might sound as if he were saying, "Men are going to be judged according to my gospel." But what he is talking about is what he has been saying. He's saying in effect, "In the day

when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ and that is in accordance with the message that I preach wherever I preach."

Now if you have a New American Standard Bible, the correction has been made and if you have probably any other modern version, it has been made there too. It's an instance of failure to consider the context in the interpretation of a section. So what Paul is saying then is he's saying that judgment must be just and he outlines this by stressing three aspects of it. There is just one principle, his judgment is righteous and that is expressed in judgment according to reality; judgment according to works; judgment according to impartiality. The first verse of chapter 2 begins, "therefore" or "wherefore" and what Paul simply says here is that the individuals of whom he's speaking are guilty because they are proclaiming the truth. They are agreeing with what he has to say, but they are content to apply it to others and as a result of that, they are doubly guilty. They are guilty because they know what the truth says and they are not doing it. And, second, they are applying the truth to others rather than to themselves. He says, "Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things."

It's so easy to do that, you know, even in evangelicalism. It's possible for us to give adherence to the truth that is preached, but simply to apply it to someone else. Failing to see ourselves is one of the greatest difficulties to spiritual progress. But, if we see ourselves, then I think we can understand the little chorus that I often used to sing around in our children's meetings. "Wonderful Savior, wonderful Friend, wonderful life that never shall end; wonderful place, He has gone to prepare, wonder of wonders I shall be there." And it is a wonder of wonders that even hypocrites shall get to heaven if they recognize their need and flee to the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Do you notice how personal Paul's preaching is too? "Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest." His preaching is not as someone has said, "That indirect, essay like preaching which is like the sheet-lightning of summer, dazzling for the moment and

flaming over a broad expanse, but altogether harmless since no bolt is launched from it."

Characteristic of the apostle's preaching is to set forth a great deal of solid theology, but at the same time, he preached to individuals. He was not the kind of person who gave out a kind of message that was heard by everybody in general, but by no one in particular. He always interspersed the ideas of "thee" and "thou" in his message. In fact, "One personal, intentional touch of the hem of Christ's garment," this same author says, "conveys more blessing than all the pressure of the crowd that thronged about the Lord Jesus Christ." So it is personal preaching and, I hope you won't mind, but if we are to preach as Paul preached, we must preach personally. You must sense that this truth is something that is for you. Not simply for the person by your side, the person across the aisle, your neighbor, or your other Christian friends, or some of your other friends and members of your family. It is for you and the apostle states that this judgment is according to reality specifically in verse 2, "But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth.

Now that word does not have the article so he is not saying according to THE truth. That is, the system of Christian doctrines that we know as the theology of the Bible. What he means here is simply that God's judgment is according to reality. It is according to truth. It's like an assayer of metal when someone brings a bar of gold bullion before him, he doesn't look at it and say, "Now, before I assay this metal, I must know where you got it. I must know how old it is. I must know from what country that it came." No; his job is simply to look at the metal and tell you exactly the percentage of gold that is found in it. That is his job. He seeks to judge according to reality. And so, the apostle, when he says here in verse 2, "We are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth" is speaking about reality. In the 3rd verse he says, "And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God?" If men cannot escape our judgment, can we possibly escape God's judgment?

I like Dr. Barnhouse's rendering of this. It's not very true to the Greek text. It's only a very, very distant paraphrase, but he starts out by saying, "You dummy. Do you really figure that you have doped out an angle that will let you go up against God and get away with it?" That's right close to

the kind of thinking that the apostle is giving us here, "Thinkest thou this, O man." That is, "You dummy that judgest them who do such things, and doest the same, that you shall escape the judgment of God?" "Or," he says, "despisest thou the riches of his goodness?" Now when he talks about this, he's speaking primarily about the Messianic promises that God gave to Israel. Chapter 3 and verse 2 speaks of them as the "oracles of God" those Messianic promises, those things that marked out Israel as different. They were the result of Israel's election, "So are you despising the goodness of God? Do you not realize that these things are designed to lead you to repentance?"

Now there is a secondary application of this and, of course, it applies to us with reference to the message that has been given to us. We have been given the gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Are we going to despise the riches of his goodness, and of his forbearance, and of his longsuffering, not realizing that in the knowledge that we have of the Bible, we have that which is to lead us to repentance? And I think it's possible for us to think even more personally with reference to this. Just think of the great temporal blessings with which God has blessed you. Many of you in this audience have everything that you need. You have food. You have clothing. You have shelter. You read in the newspapers about the poor of the world and you cannot really identify with them because you do not have the same things to struggle with that they do. You have everything materially that one could expect. You have a good business or you've been successful with your employment. You have your future marked out pretty well and do you not realize that this goodness that God has given you, in a temporal way, is designed to be the means by which you may move on to an understanding of God's spiritual goodness through the Lord Jesus Christ?

Not only do you have temporal things, but you also have spiritual things. Many of you have been brought up in a country where the gospel is freely proclaimed. You can turn on your radio or your TV and you can hear the message, "Christ died for sinners." You perhaps have heard it from the time that you were a little child. You've sat in a church and, the chances are, you've sat in a church where the gospel was preached at one time or another. If you've come to Believers Chapel,

you've heard the gospel preached Sunday after Sunday. God has blessed you and given you great goodness in bringing you under the sound of the message.

And not only that, at times he has spoken to you in a very earnest and stirring way through the preacher of the message and you have felt even within a stirring to respond to that message as the earnestness of the preacher impressed itself upon you. You've even come to the place, some of you, where you've been like Felix almost persuaded, but you've asked for another time, a more convenient season. Despiseth thou the goodness of God, my dear friend, or his forbearance, his withholding of punishment after offense? There are men who are very quick tempered. You do something that displeases them and it's just a moment before they're furious and blows are being struck, but God has great forbearance. He has allowed you to rebel against him, to strike him in the face, to do him despite down through the months and years of your life. It is his goodness that he has withheld his divine judgment and given you an opportunity to respond to the gospel. Justice has often laid its hand on the sword in order that you might be punished, but mercy has held it back in its scabbard till the appointed time and longsuffering. Forbearance has to do with the magnitude of sin; longsuffering with the multitude.

In the case of the Jewish people and the time of the Apostle Paul, it had been about forty years, or going on forty years now like the forty years in the wilderness that God bore with the children of Israel. And for forty years, God's longsuffering and his forbearance was in operation with reference to Israel, but finally the end was reached and there is always an end with God. And Israel in the year of seventy A.D. was scattered to the four corners of the world in divine judgment after that forty year trial period from the appearance of the Lord Jesus till seventy A.D. Since that time, on into our 20th Century, Israel has been scattered to the four corners of the earth in retributive judgment of God.

Isn't it interesting thing that in Believers Chapel, we've been in existence about eighteen years now, and the gospel has been proclaimed. And it may be that we're halfway through our period of forbearance and longsuffering, too, because the history of evangelicalism is that God operates on

similar principles. If we do not respond to his message, then sooner or later, the signs of hardening begin to come into a congregation. There comes in indifference. The second generation comes along, the little children who haven't known what it is to be truly saved, haven't known what it is to have the despair of being justified in one's own sins in one's heart. Has not known what it is for the burden to roll off and roll down by the foot of the cross into the sepulcher as Bunyan speaks about in *Pilgrim's Progress*. There are the nicest, kindest kinds of people who sit in congregations just like this who have never known what it is to be truly lost and, therefore, have never known what it is to be truly saved. And when the indifference comes in and the coldness and hardness of heart, the gospel is still proclaimed, but there is no response, and then as the generations come, ultimately, there comes the departure from the truth of God that leads to apostasy. And the Christian churches around the country of the United States are testimonies to the fact that God's retributive justice is still in operation today.

One of the saddest experiences that anyone can have is to go into a great beautiful church building and then to hear nothing within it. God's justice has been at operation. "Despise thou the goodness of God?" "Don't you know that that's designed to lead you to repentance?" Paul says. Then in the next few verses, he gives a second variation of that theme refusing the promises. They are treasuring up wrath for themselves and he states it in verse 6 again. The same principle, but with a little different touch, "He's going to render to every man according to his deeds."

Now that expresses the principle very precisely. "But can we reconcile judgment by works with justification apart from works?" It will help us as we read these verses to remember that Paul is not expounding the gospel. He's expounding the law and he's pointing out that the law condemns. Now he does say that as an ideal method of salvation, if a man could keep the law, he would be righteous. But, unfortunately, no man can keep the law. The law merely condemns us because we are sinners and, therefore, the evidences of our nature must ultimately be seen. But, ideally, for those who do good works, there is the reward of eternal life, but those who disobey the truth there is the reward of eternal death. Paul, however, is not expounding a system of justification here. He really is

expounding the principles of the law and what he has in mind primarily is the legal sin of the Jew, for they did think that if you kept the law, you could be saved.

Now he wants to show them that they are hypocrites, because the thing that they profess, they are not living up to. He doesn't, at this point, point out that one cannot be saved by the law. He simply says there are these two methods, but he wants to bring them to the place where they recognize they're not keeping the law so that they might be prepared for the reception of the message of deliverance through the gospel. So he has in mind, I say, the legal sin of the Jew; the knowledge without practice; the creed without conduct.

What I think he has in mind is expressed in many rabbinic statements of an era just after that time. This is what we find in some of the Jewish literature, "All Israelites will have a part in the world to come." Here is another statement, "Abraham sits beside the gates of hell, and does not permit any wicked Israelite to go down to hell." Just as if we were to conjure up something and say, "John Calvin sits by the gates of hell, and does not permit any true Calvinist from Believers Chapel to enter into hell." There are people, you know, even talk of the doctrines of sovereign grace, and I wonder if they really understand them at all. And so, the apostle here's another statement, "The wisdom of Solomon, even if we sin we are thine knowing thy dominion." It is possible for us to think that we get to heaven by what we know. But what we know, while very important, must be followed also by the practice of that particular truth. So Paul is dealing then with the legal sin of the Jew.

He does speak about individuals who work good in verse 10, "But glory, honor, and peace, to every man that worketh good" and that is right. But, he will later say that no man can work good of himself. The only way in which he can work good is through coming to the knowledge of salvation and new life and having that new life through the Holy Spirit producing good in him. He's alluding here, in my opinion, to the truth expressed by James that "faith without works is dead," but true saving faith does produce good works. And finally in the latter part of the section, he speaks about God's judgment being impartial. The "for" of verse 12 gives the explanation of verse 11,

"There is no respect of persons with God. For he will judge by the light that a person possesses for those who have the law, he will judge by the Mosaic law. For those who do not have the law like the Gentiles, he will judge them by the moral law implanted within their heart. He says in verse 14, "For when the Gentiles, who have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: who shew the work of the law written in their hearts." He doesn't mean to indicate that Gentiles can do the work of the law perfectly. He says simply that occasionally they do, do things that are not contrary to the law that uphold the principles of the law.

Now we can see this in the Moslem world of the East at the present day. They have very stringent laws against adultery. Well that, according to the Bible, is in harmony with the Bible. So they would be doing, they show the work of the law written in their hearts. They are doing by nature the things contained in the law. But it does not mean that they are thereby justified because while they may here and there do things that are in harmony with the law, Paul will later point out that they are condemned by that law because they have broken it. So here, he will say they will be judged by that moral law that is implanted within their hearts. The reason that the Mohammedans do what they do about adultery is because God has implanted in the human heart by virtue of the possession of the image of God, the moral law. That is, a certain knowledge of what is right and what is wrong. And further, he has given all men a conscience, an inward monitor by which they know what is right and what is wrong. But it's not the ultimate standard because even it can be seared.

Now in verse 13 he says, "For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified." Now this is a very simple truth, but often we forget how important it is. We forget that it is possible for us to make the claim that we are really keeping the law when we're not keeping the law at all. It reminds me of a father who calls his child, "John! Come here!" and John, sitting down on the ground playing, says to his friend, "Doesn't my father have a beautiful voice? Doesn't he have great volume? I know other fathers who don't speak so plainly and distinctly as he, but he speaks distinctly and clearly. Doesn't even have a southern accent." [Laughter] But if he doesn't come, what good is it to admire the voice and to approve the tone? And so, likewise, Paul

said, "It's not the hearers of the law that are justified. It's the doers of law. To hear the law is important, but to do it is what makes for obedience." So the apostle stresses that one must expect that if there is no obedience, he stands under the judgment of God.

Now, incidentally, in that verse, the 13th verse, we have the first instance of the word justified. That is, the first instance of the verb to justify and it gives us a clue as to its meaning right here. The doers of the law shall be justified. To justify is not to make righteous. To justify is to declare righteous and this, of course, proves it, because a doer of the law cannot be justified if it means to make righteous, because he's already righteous by definition. If he does the law, he is just. If we say that the doer of the law is justified, we mean simply that his righteousness is recognized or declared.

In the 4th verse of the 3rd chapter, we will find the apostle speaking of God being justified. He doesn't need to be made righteous. He is righteous. He is justified when he is declared to be what he is. And so, the doer of the law is one who is declared to be righteous because he does the law. To be justified by the gospel is not to be made righteous. It's to be declared righteous, but we'll say more about that later on in great detail. So I don't want to say too much about it now.

Finally, Paul concludes the 16th verse by saying, "In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel." Now there is something new in that verse and that is that God is going to judge the world by Jesus Christ. That's something you don't find in the Old Testament. That's something that our Lord expressed and it's something that the apostles picked up and expressed as well. The apostle, in the city of Athens, spoke about this in chapter 17 and verse 31 of that particular book. He spoke to the crowd at Athens and said to them in the 31st verse of chapter 17 that, "God had appointed a day, in which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; concerning whom he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead." So men shall be judged through Jesus Christ. Incidentally, if men are to be judged through Jesus Christ, if the secrets of men's hearts are to be unfolded and

revealed by Jesus Christ, it's obvious that Jesus Christ must be God because only God knows the secrets of men's hearts.

Well, this passage then shows the certainty of divine judgment, "It is appointed unto men once to die and then after this the judgment." It shows the universality of judgment too. In the 9th verse the apostle writes, "Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Greeks." It expresses the fact that there is no hope outside of Jesus Christ as conduct and conscience of men who are truly responsive to the word prove. "All men think all men mortal but themselves." And so, consequently, when heart attacks occur around us, when cancer occurs around us, we cannot think that we ourselves will be affected. We tend to think, yes, others are affected, but not us.

I wish it were possible for me to be like a Jonah and call upon you to repent. Or to be like a Jeremiah who said, "O that my head were waters and mine eyes a fountain of tears that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people." It is one of the things that terrifies me more than anything else to realize that in the midst of Believers Chapel where I have preached for a number of years, there should be individuals in this auditorium, even today, who have heard over and over again the gospel message, but have evidently not responded to it much at all. It's one of the saddest things. Don't say like that one to whom Paul preached, "Go thy way for this time Dr. Johnson. When I have a more convenient season, I will send for you." George Whitefield used to speak about the wrath of God. He would say, "Oh, my hearers," and then there would come a flood of tears which he couldn't restrain, "the wrath is to come. The wrath is to come. Flee from the wrath to come."

One of the great blessings of this passage is the logic of it. If it is the goodness of God that is designed to lead us to repentance, how wonderful that is. Every day you get up in the morning and you look out and the sun has come up or light is there, you should say within your heart through the Holy Spirit, "God has given me some more time by which I may repent." And as you sit down at your breakfast table and eat your food, it is that God may give you more life in order that you may

repent. And then at night as you prepare for your rest, God has given you a night of rest in order that you may get up and repent.

The goodness of God is designed to lead thee to repentance. You have missed the point of life, if you have not come to repentance; a recognition of your lost condition and of the saving ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. And to have the Bible, the Bible in many of the rooms of your home, and sermons to hear on Sunday and, especially, to have the cross of Jesus Christ, you have the goodness of God that is immeasurable, all designed to lead you to repentance. "Amazing love, how can it be, that Thou my God shouldst die for me?" The apostle tells us the way of escape. He says it's according to his gospel, his good news. And that good news is there's a righteousness of God available to everyone that believeth. He said that in the first chapter, "This is the message I preach. It's my gospel."

May God help you to be able to say truly in your heart, "O Rock of Ages, cleft for me, let me hide myself in Thee." This good news is Paul's gospel. It's the gospel of Augustine. It was the gospel of Tyndale. It was gospel of Huss. It was the gospel of Wycliffe. It was the gospel of Luther. It was the gospel of Calvin. It was the gospel of Wesley. It was the gospel of Whitefield. And it's been the gospel of God's faithful servants down through the centuries. May God help you to say, "Yes, Dr. Johnson, it's the gospel of all of these great men, but it's my gospel too." If you're here this morning and you have never believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, the judgment of God is real and inescapable. May God help you to be prepared for it. As far as I'm concerned, I've tried to the best of my ability to preach to you the goodness of the grace of God. And I do hope by God's sovereign, convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit, you may have been brought to realize your lost condition and come to him. May we stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for the goodness with which Thou hast so wonderfully surrounded us. We thank Thee for the life that Thou hast given, for the bread upon the table, the clothes upon our backs, the roof that is over our heads, the family and friends who have

meant so much to us, those individuals who have cared enough to tell us something about the gospel of Jesus Christ. And we especially praise Thee for the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit who has brought us to the knowledge of our own sin and of our need. We know that the judgment of God is just and we know that it is inescapable. O God, if there should be someone in this audience who has not responded through the Holy Spirit bring to conviction and conversion right now. May within their heart...

**[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]**