

Lesson Five

(2:1-16)

PRINCIPLES OF JUDGMENT

The first sixteen verses of this section are transitional and move tactfully from talking about the Gentiles to a discussion of the Jews. Every verse in the chapter applies to Jews, but the Jew is not specifically mentioned until verse seventeen. Paul's tact reminds one of the boxer who spars carefully, throwing light jabs, until he can land a heavy blow.

Universal judgment is a basic principle enunciated again and again by the prophets and apostles. These verses make it clear that no man can escape giving an account of his life to God. The Jews would heartily agree with Paul that the Gentiles were debased, sinful, and worthy of God's condemnation. They would approve of the apostle's statement that the Gentiles should know that people who commit the sins which Paul accused the Gentiles of doing are worthy of death (1:32). The Jews, however, never dreamed that they were just as guilty of sin before God as were the Gentiles. Whitby quotes passages from Josephus by which he seeks to show that the Jews were guilty of most of the crimes enumerated in chapter one, (see the footnote, *Diaglott*, B. Wilson, p. 514).

THE BOOMERANG OF JUDGMENT

1 Wherefore thou art without excuse, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest dost practise the same things. 2 And we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against them that practise such things. 3 And reckonest thou this, O man, who judgest them that practise such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God?

Whether the Jews duplicated the sins of the Gentiles or not is beside the point. The Gentiles committed sin and consented with others who did the same (1:32). The Jews committed sin but justified themselves while they condemned others who also sinned. These three verses are referred to as being a Nathan-like passage. Anyone who is familiar with the content of II Samuel 12:1-6 knows why the Nathan-like designation is appropriate. The "O man" of verses one and three are very personal and emphatic. This expression reminds of the moment when Nathan, the prophet of God, pointed his verbal finger at King David and said to the sinful king, "Thou art the man." David was willing that another should die for a sin which was very similar to his own moral deviation. He had no awareness, however, that when he pronounced judgment upon another that he was at the same time condemning himself. Numerous authors supply quotes of Jewish writings which indicate a proud, self-righteous view of their own people and a claim to a unique relationship with God which no other nation enjoyed. They considered God to be a "protector of the Jews, but a judge of the Gentiles." "God loves Israel alone of all the nations of the earth." Another said, "God will judge the Jews with one measure and the Gentiles with another." It is common in Christian countries to hear jokes about St. Peter, with his keys, controlling entrance through the golden gate into heaven. Some misguided persons may even give credence to such a concept about the apostle Peter's personal role in determining who will enter into heaven and who will not be allowed to do so. The Jews, in all seriousness, had Abraham playing such a role although he functioned at the other end of the spirit world. Abraham is pictured as sitting beside the gates of hell, and he will not permit any wicked Israelite to go through. Justin's *Dialogue With Trypho* lends support to such a concept as being then current. In this dialogue with a Jew, the Jew is saying, "They who are the seed of Abraham according to the flesh shall in any case, even if they be sinners and unbelieving and disobedient towards God, share in the eternal kingdom." Jesus had to deal with this kind of Jewish pride and the notions that produced a spirit of national exclusivism among them. As Jesus journeyed from the north, with Jerusalem his destination,

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someone said unto him, "Are they few that be saved?" It is easy to suspect that the questioner was a lawyer who was aware of the controversy which broke out again and again between the conservative and liberal schools of Judaism. The liberals held that many Gentiles would be saved. The conservatives limited salvation mainly to Jews. Perhaps a few Gentiles would be saved if they became proselytes to Judaism and strictly practiced the tenets of the Jewish law. To all who heard this question asked about how many would be saved, Jesus pointed out that salvation was universal and that the redeemed shall "come from the east and west and from the north and south and shall sit down in the kingdom of God." Then Jesus added what seems to be a favorite saying of his, "There are last who shall be first and first who shall be last," (Luke 13:22-30). Sometimes "the last" and "the first" contrast the rich and poor or the self-righteous as distinct from those who admitted they were sinners. In this case, the last were the Gentiles who shall enter into the kingdom of God, and those who considered themselves to be first would be "cast forth without" and for them, according to Jesus, there would be the "weeping and gnashing of teeth."

The warning against judging others by Paul is very much like the prohibitions of Jesus against judging fellowmen recorded in Matthew 7:1-5. In neither instance of warning, however, is one's critical faculties of evaluation to be suspended. Christians must always make judgments with reference to what is good or bad. As early in my life as I can remember, my Christian parents taught me,

"Good, better, best
Never let it rest
Until the good is better
And the better is best."

How could a child or young man fulfill such directives unless he constantly judged the correctness and value of motives, acts, fruit, etc. This evaluation involves what others are doing as well as what one is doing himself. How frequently a young man is lured into that which is questionable by the phrase, "Everybody is doing it." One must always evaluate all things and make careful moral decisions, discerning what is right and wrong, (I Corinthians 2:15; Galatians 6:1). That which both Jesus and Paul strike out against is a harsh, censorious, judgmental spirit which condemns others. That's exactly what the Jews of Paul's day were doing. They condemned others while they wore out their arms patting themselves on the back. God alone has the prerogative to judge and the right to pronounce sentence of eternal condemnation. Far too frequently men put on their legal boots, pretend to be judges, and go

tramping around in God's legislative field. Jesus and Paul try to help us by putting up signs at the perimeter of God's territory in large clear letters, "NO TRESPASSING."

THE GOODNESS AND JUSTICE OF GOD

4 Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? 5 but after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up for thyself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; 6 who will render to every man according to his works: 7 to them that by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and incorruption, eternal life: 8 but unto them that are factious, and obey not the truth, but obey unrighteousness, shall be wrath and indignation, 9 tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that worketh evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Greek; 10 but glory and honor and peace to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek: 11 for there is no respect of persons with God.

The Jew's response to God's goodness resulted in judgment upon themselves. Somehow the Jews considered the goodness of God to be an invitation to sin rather than a motivating force to lead them to repentance. They despised God's goodness and longsuffering (v. 4). Instead of responding to God's love and mercy by turning away from sin, they hardened their hearts and put themselves in a position to receive the wrath of God (v. 5).

The Jews were, in fact, laying up a treasure but what a horrible horde it was which they were accumulating as they amassed for themselves wrath. Their bank account is to be revealed in the final judgment (v. 5). The "day of wrath" timewise, should be understood to be the same as the "day of the Lord" in Obadiah, Joel, Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Zephaniah, Zechariah, Malachi, and Revelation. Paul calls it simply "the day" in I Corinthians 3:13.

Verse six of our text embodies the universal principle of seedtime and harvest. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap, (Galatians 6:7-10). Charles Hodge thought Paul was expounding the law here and not the Gospel. There is a very real sense in which Hodge is right. According to the Gospel there is a way to avoid reaping the seeds of sin. Through Christ God can remove sin and give a transplant of righteousness and we rejoice that as "law was given through Moses, grace and truth came

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through Jesus Christ" (John 1:16). Paul's emphasis in this passage is not so much a legalistic one in which he is claiming "tit for tat" but rather he contrasts the entire mode and tenor of one man's life with that of another. If a man is controlled by the desire to obey God and his pursuit is after that in which one can glory and not be ashamed, if he seeks for that which brings honor and his life is characterized by purity then he shall receive from God accordingly as he has sown. He shall be the recipient of eternal life (v. 7). On the other hand, if one's life may be described by such words as factious and disobedient, and the ruling principle in life is unrighteousness so that he continually works evil, that one can only reap tribulation and anguish (v. 9). It is of no force that a person is a Gentile or a Jew. "There is no respect of persons with God" (v. 11). The Lord does not judge on the basis of accidentals nor externals. He is a respecter of faith, love, praiseworthy character and good works. The Jews depended upon genealogy, ceremonialism and the fact that God had delivered his revelations to man basically through the Jews. It is in this general sense that Paul is comparing Jews and Gentiles and is applying the natural law of seedtime and harvest as well as the basic truth that God is not partial toward any segment of mankind. So the phrase, "soul of man" (v. 9), should not be understood to mean that God's wrath shall come upon "the soul" of each individual. Rather, "soul" stands for the entire man and "man" stands for humanity so that Paul is saying, "every person of the whole of mankind" is subject to this principle of judgment.

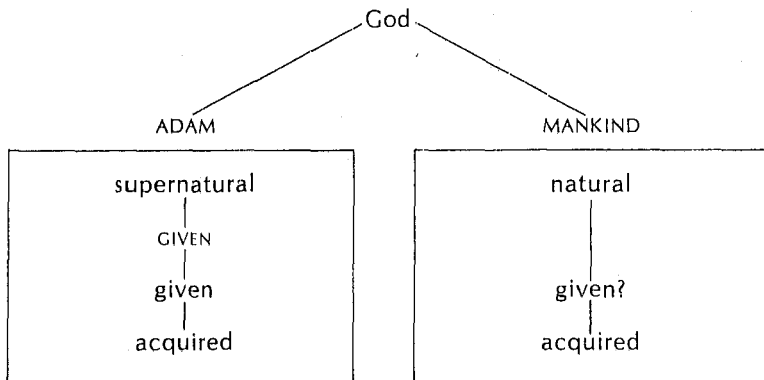
JUDGMENT BASED ON AVAILABLE KNOWLEDGE

12 For as many as have sinned without the law shall also perish without the law: and as many as have sinned under the law shall be judged by the law; 13 for not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified: 14 (for when Gentiles that have not the law do these, not having the law, are the law unto themselves; 15 in that they show the work of the law written therewith, and their thoughts one with another accusing or else excusing them;) 16 in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men, according to my gospel, by Jesus Christ.

Verses 12-16 continue the contention of Paul that God deals with men impartially. Both Gentiles (those "without the law") and Jews (those "under the law") have sinned. The Gentiles know God and His intentions for man through nature. Obviously they cannot know through nature the personal God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob any more than they

could know the Lord Jesus Christ. Knowledge of a creator God is possible, however, and they can learn from nature some basic principles about His will. One does not need a Bible to know that God gave life to his fellowman, and that it is immoral to murder. It is also obvious that God provided for man to have ample food, and there is nothing immoral about destroying other forms of life, as they are needed, to sustain the life of a man. As stated before, it is abundantly clear through natural revelation that God did not intend man to be homosexual. There is revealed through nature sufficient knowledge of God and His will that the Gentile who has no supernatural revelation to instruct him knows enough to possess a functional conscience (v. 15). Only an informed conscience can function, "accusing or else excusing." It is a common fallacy to think that the conscience is an informer. "My conscience tells me," is a common, but false, statement. To inform is not the function of the conscience. The reverse is true and only after the conscience has become informed by securing knowledge from the intellect can it discern right and wrong. On the basis of truth the good conscience approves or disapproves and exerts its influence upon the will of man. The "branded" or "seared" conscience of 1 Timothy 4:1, 2 is the product of seduction and false doctrine. Any conscience bereft of truth cannot function properly. The Gentiles had natural revelation and the Jews had supernatural revelation in addition to that possessed by the Gentiles. God spoke to the Jewish fathers in many different "portions" and "manners" (Hebrews 1:1). So Paul concludes that all men have known God and His will in one degree or another. Some do "by nature" the will of God. Some receive knowledge above and beyond nature. All of each category have knowledge of both God and sin, and there is a reasonable basis upon which the judgments rendered by personal conscience are valid and upon which all may be judged by God.

Natural and Supernatural Revelation, Verses 12-16:



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Adam had a supernatural beginning, being created, whereas all others begin with a natural birth. So we must allow for an unknown quantity which, in the above diagram, is designated "GIVEN" on the side of Adam. There is no such quantity which can be posited for any other of the human race with the possible exception of Eve. Hence, the corresponding space in the diagram is vacant on the side of mankind. The word "given" may mean something more for Adam than for mankind in general because he walked and talked with God. Perhaps more knowledge was given to Adam in that direct personal exchange with God than any later member of the human race received in an indirect fellowship with God. Thus the question mark after "given?" under the heading of Mankind is meant to signify a possible distinction between the "given" to Adam and to all other men. The knowledge which is "acquired" is the same on both sides. In Adam's case it refers to whatever knowledge he may have acquired after banishment from the Garden of Eden when his state of relationship with God was similar to that which all men have experienced subsequent to the entrance of sin into the stream of human life.

Verse sixteen must be interpreted in the light of all that Paul has taught in Chapters one and two. Paul is not stating that all men will be judged by the Gospel. Such an implication in connection with the phrase "according to my gospel" is exactly the opposite of what Paul has just previously stated. Those with the law are judged by the law. Those without the law become a law unto themselves ("whatsoever is not of faith is sin," Romans 14:23), and they are judged.

Then if some people never heard the Gospel, having lived before it came or having lived in a land where the name of Jesus was never heard, how could the Gospel be the yardstick by which they are judged? What Paul is affirming unequivocally is that one of the basic doctrines of the Gospel which he preaches is that all men will be judged by God. In that climactic event of judgment even the secrets of men (conscience, etc.) will serve as part of the basis for judgment (v. 16).

Summary Statements

There are basic principles of the doctrine of the judgment of God stated in this section of study which need to be recalled:

1. The judgment of God is "according to truth" (v. 2).
2. Every man shall be judged according to his works (v. 6). (As set forth earlier in this lesson, "works" in this context has reference more to the overall trend of one's life than to specific acts).
3. God's judgment is wholly impartial (v. 11).
4. The judgment of God is universal (vv. 12-16). (Note also the "everyone" of v. 6.)

The threefold truth which must not be missed is that all have sinned, all shall be judged, and all need a Savior. This truth ought to drive us to the ends of the earth with the blessed Good News about Jesus offering freedom, through faith in Him, from the damning power of sin and from the judgment of God which sin brings upon every soul.

READER'S REVIEW:

1. How does Paul demonstrate the use of tact in the opening paragraph of Chapter Two?
2. What is a basic difference in the attitude of the Jew and Gentile toward sin?
3. What is meant by the designation, "A Nathan-like passage"?
4. How is the role of Peter and Abraham contrasted with reference to their control of the eternal destiny of men?
5. What evidence can you cite to show that a spirit of Jewish exclusivism was present in Jesus' day?
6. Can you explain the difference in what is meant by the terms "critical evaluation" and "harsh judgment"?
7. To what does the author apply the sign "No Trespassing"?
8. What was it that the Jews were saving up for themselves?
9. How did the Jews interpret the goodness of God?
10. List at least three other Biblical terms which are the equivalent of the "day of wrath."
11. Explain the universal principle of "seedtime and harvest."
12. In what way does the Gospel seem to violate the universal principle of "seedtime and harvest"?
13. If God is no respecter of persons, what is it to which he does pay respect?
14. Explain how God can justly judge both the Jew and the Gentile when the quantity and quality of the revelation given to each is so different?
15. What does Paul mean when he says, "according to my Gospel" all shall be judged?
16. What is the basic function of man's conscience?
17. How does the phrase "whatsoever is not of faith is sin" found in Chapter Fourteen apply to this second chapter?
18. Make comparisons and contrasts between the knowledge for which Adam would be accountable and that for which all other men must give account.
19. List four basic principles of God's judgment learned from this lesson.
20. What are the three specific parts of that statement which the author calls the "threefold truth" given in the summary paragraph of this chapter?