Principles of God's Judgment, Part 4b
Scripture: Romans 2:11-16
Code: 45-20B

Now, immediately at this point Paul knows the Jew's going to ask a question. He's going to say this: "Now, wait a minute, Paul. We who have been the guardians of the law, we who have been the agents by which God has revealed the law, we who have written it and rewritten it and preserved it, we should have the higher honor, not the greater condemnation. We who have possessed the law should be protected from God's wrath." And some people today would join in, say, "Yeah, I've been going to church all my life, I've been trying to be religious, I bought a Bible. I'm trying to be religious. I mean how can we be condemned? We've been the religious ones, we've preserved the law." Some are going to say, "I've taught in seminary, I've taught in seminary all my career. I've prepared men to go out and serve in churches" – of course, seminaries that don't believe the Bible and churches that don't, either – "but we've been religious, we've been connected to Christianity. I mean it's us, I mean, you know, us, the religious folks."

Paul replies in verse 13, – "For not the hearers of the law are just before God but the" – what? – "the doers of the law shall be justified." Now, the word for "hearers" is not the usual word. It is not the normal word akou, which is the normal word to hear, but it is akroats, and it's used specifically of pupils who hear because they're constantly in the educational process. Vincent, I think, is a good translation of it, "Those whose business is hearing," and that is exactly what the Jews did in the synagogues, didn't they? They heard and heard and heard and heard, it was read to them week after week after week after week after week, it was explained to them and they were literally professional hearers. But it is not to the ones who make it their business to do the hearing, it is to the ones who make it their business to do the doing that justification comes. It is not performance, beloved, it is possession.

That's why James warns us, you see, in the same way. James says, "But be ye doers of the Word and not" – what? – "hearers only because if you are, you are deceiving your own selves." What a deceit. God's law doesn't protect hearers from judgment. No, the more they hear, the deeper the judgment. I know some people are going to come to the judgment and they're going to say, "God, if You – I mean do You have a record of how many hours I listened to MacArthur? That ought to be good for something. And my wife, wherever she is, tapes – I listened to those things. All the time, she played them. I mean isn't that good for something? I mean she even played Christian music and then she bought Bible tapes and some guy read the Bible all the time. And I used to have to sit in the kitchen while they had a Bible study in my living room."

Some of you fathers might have to say that about your children, say, “Well, I mean I heard it all, I was there, I – we – I did everything I could to make them comfortable and I didn’t throw the tapes out, I didn’t kick my wife out, I mean I went to church – isn’t that good for something?” Yeah, greater condemnation. See, God’s law does not protect. The more you know God’s law, the more it intensifies the consequence unless it is obeyed.

And here’s the terrible frustration, because you can’t obey it in your own strength. And so he literally backs them into a corner, you see. I mean you’re constantly hearing but you don’t do it. And so there is a judicial verdict against you. But the one who does – verse 13 – the doer of the law shall be justified, not the hearer.

So God requires perfect obedience. God requires a manifestation of righteousness but no one can do that. Thus, the law is meant to drive us to a point of desperation where we turn to God for the power to do what we otherwise couldn’t do. So the question the Jew might ask is answered. It doesn’t do you a bit of good to have it unless you do it, it just intensifies your guilt because only the one who does it is justified, and that’s a judicial verdict there.

Are you ready for the second question? Here it comes. Now, this is the question asked by the Gentile or the pagan or the one who didn’t have the law. He’s going to say, “Now, wait a minute – now, wait a minute. We never had the law. And if we never had the law, how in the world can we be condemned for not obeying it?” Fair question? The Jew says this, “We are exempt because of special favor.” God says no. The Gentile says, “We are exempt because of ignorance.” Is that right? What about that pagan? What about that heathen who never saw the law of God, never read the Scripture, never heard the gospel? Can you condemn somebody for not obeying the written word?

I mean after all, in Romans 4:15, it says, “Where no law is, there is no transgression.” And in Romans 5:13, it says, “For until the law, sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law.” And in Romans 7:7: “What shall we say then, is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law.” So if there is no transgression when there’s no law, and there’s no knowledge of sin when there’s no law, how can we be responsible when we don’t have the written law? And a lot of people ask that question. Does God hold people responsible who have never heard the written law of God?

Let’s find out the answer. Verse 14: “For when the heathen” – or pagan, Gentiles, ethn – “who have not the law” – that is the written law now, keep that in mind, the written law, they don’t have that – “when they do by nature the things contained in the law, these having not the law are a law unto themselves who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another.”

Now, what is he saying? He's saying simply this: You do not have to have the written law to be responsible for you have a law within you manifest in your behavior, manifest in your conscience, and manifest in your thinking patterns. There are four great reasons why the heathen are lost. Here they come. Reason number one, creation. Creation. Go back to chapter 1 and we'll pick up a thought from verse 18. "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and all unrighteousness of men." Now, you see it is not just the religious men, it is not just the people with the law of God, it is all men, all men, all men. The wrath of God is revealed against all of the ungodliness and all of the unrighteousness of all men, whether they had the written law or not. Why? Because they hold the truth.

How do they hold the truth? Verse 19: "That which may be known about God is manifest in them." How is it manifest in them? Well, God has shown it unto them. Well, how did He show it unto them? "For the invisible things of Him from the" – what? – "creation of the world are clearly seen so that they are without excuse." So from chapter 1, we learn the first reason why the heathen are lost: creation. They can look around them and know there's a God. They can look around them and perceive that He is supernatural and that He is more powerful than any being that they know of in their dimension, and so they are responsible because they hold that knowledge.

But now as we come to chapter 2, we find the three remaining reasons why the heathen are lost and why we have to send missionaries to reach them. Verse 14 – and the word is "conduct." First, they're lost because of creation; secondly, because of conduct. "For when the heathen who have not the law do by nature" – or do naturally – "the things contained in the law, these though they don't have the law become a law unto themselves." In other words, they don't have an outside law, but they have an internal law that makes them a law unto themselves and it is manifest in their conduct.

Now, "when the heathen . . . do by nature the things contained in the law" indicates that it does occur. When they do it and it is a common occurrence. Pagans naturally do things that are written in God's law. Did you know that? Without ever reading God's law. Their conduct – listen to this now. Their conduct proves they know what is right and wrong. Their conduct proves that there is available within, them residing in them, the law of God.

Sometimes pagans pay their debts. Is that in the law of God? Yes. They honor their parents. There are many people who do not know Jesus Christ, do not know God, never read the Bible, who love their wives. There are many wives who so love their husbands. There are many people who have never heard the gospel of Jesus Christ who care for their children and there are many children who care for their parents. There are many of them who believe it's wrong to kill. There are many people who've never known Jesus Christ or the message of Christ or the Bible or the meaning of the gospel who would feed the hungry, who would help a man who was sick or a woman who was sick. Pagans will tell the truth sometimes. They will even seek to do justice. They will struggle for equity. You see, all of these things reveal an internal human code of ethics that is the law unto themselves.

We see it in our human system of justice. We see it in our humanitarianism and the humanitarianism and the justice around the world even in very obscure and isolated peoples. Sometimes it's warped, but in any society you ever see, you will find some of those heathen exercising things which they do naturally that are in direct line with God's law. and they therefore show that that law is in them.

The Stoics said that in the universe there were certain laws operative which a man broke at his own peril, and the Stoics, who were utterly pagan philosophers, said they are the laws of health, the laws of morality, and the laws governing life and living. And the Stoics called all of these laws phusis, which means nature. They said men are to live kata phusin, they are to live according to what is natural. The Stoics actually said that these laws were natural to man. You see, man can recognize that there is a right, that there is a code of ethics. The very fact that man has a guilty conscience is because he violates the very code of ethics that's in him. There's a sense of right and wrong, and when men naturally do something that lines up with the law of God – and they do it all the time – they show that the law of God is written in them.

The unregenerate world, you see, does do relative human good. They do not do good in terms of spiritual righteousness. They do not do good in terms of good that is based on the right motive because nothing is truly good unless it is done for the glory of God, right? But they do good in a relative human sense, and when they do that, they show the law of God at work, though unwritten, at work in their heart. They will do good in the right manner if not for the right motive.

I think about Cyrus in the Old Testament who did good. He let God's people go. I think about Darius. I think about Artaxerxes. And they are even commended. Ezra, chapter 7, commends Artaxerxes. Pagans who did good on behalf of God's people. What about the city clerk in Ephesus? A pagan who quieted the rioters. What about Romans of high standing in Acts 23 who protected Paul? And even the barbarians who showed unusual kindness to Paul in building a fire in Acts 28 to warm him?

Man is totally depraved in the sense that he cannot do anything that is righteously good or that is good toward God or that is good as revealing God. But he can do a man kind of good. But every time he does that, he proves that there is a law within him that points to that as good. Are the heathen lost? Yes. Can they claim ignorance? No. First, because of creation. It is around them. And they can perceive within their own minds God in that creation, and secondly, because of their conduct, they prove that there's a law within them.

Now, this may shock you. Basically, if you look at it simply from the standpoint of general human good, most people are outside the prisons, right? It's the few that are inside. What does this mean? This does not mean that man is basically good – he is depraved – but there is in him a sense of rightness that keeps him from being as bad as he possibly could be and that is the law of God within him.

Now, extending the thought, let's look at a third reason why the heathen are lost and that is conscience. And this is part of that same concept in verse 14 but it's in verse 15. They not only reveal the work of the law within them by their conduct when they do naturally the things that are in them, but they also reveal the law of God written in their hearts when their conscience functions in bearing testimony – and stop there for a minute. Now, we all know what conscience is. The word simply means co-knowledge. And I guess we could say that it means co-knowledge with oneself. The etymology of the word basically comes – whether it's in Greek or Latin or English – from the same root. The idea is to know along with. And conscience is sort of that thing in you that knows along with you what's right. It refers to a person's inner sense of right and wrong, the moral consciousness that pronounces judgment on thoughts and attitudes and speech and deeds.

You know, I remember reading about a tribe in Africa that had a very interesting process to determine who was guilty of something. When there was some stealing that had gone on in the tribe, they would line all of the men up because stealing was normally done by men, and they would go along and they would ask them if they did it and they would say yes or no. And then they would, after having said it, ask them to stick their tongue out, at which time they took a hot knife and placed it on the tongue. If there was saliva on the tongue, the knife would be removed without a problem. If there was no saliva on the tongue, the knife would stick and burn its way through their tongue. And they could always tell who the liar was because he had no saliva.

What makes your saliva dry up when you do something wrong? There's a conscience in you. There's a thought process in you that knows right and knows wrong and deals with you when you violate it. It's like when you cheat and you live in this constant state of fear of being found out. That's conscience. Conscience responds to the internal norm, and I would say in the Christian, of course, conscience is tremendously intensified because you not only have that basic law within you but you have also the law of Christ from His Word added to the normal natural law, and the compounding of that even excites the conscience more to respond.

And Paul listened to his conscience. Several times he said, "My conscience bears witness," didn't he? In other words, he was saying, "My conscience agrees with me that I'm doing right, that my heart is pure." The Bible also suggests that your conscience can become scarred and scar tissue has no feeling. That's why Paul in Romans tells us, "Do not violate your conscience. Don't violate your conscience." In other words, he's talking about Christian liberty and he says if you – if somebody tells you it's okay to do that but your conscience says don't do that, then don't do it even though it is okay because if you get in the habit of violating your conscience, you're going to scar something that you desperately need to protect you. It's like losing your sense of feeling.

You know, I shared with you some months ago that I read a book about leprosy, and they have discovered that leprosy is not what they thought originally. People thought that when you got leprosy,

your skin just kind of ate itself and eventually your extremities were just disappearing. What they now know is that leprosy creates the absolute deadening of all sense and you wear out your extremities. Because you can't feel anything, you rub your fingers off or your rub your nose off because there's no feeling. That's what happens when conscience is scarred, and so Paul says don't do that. Even the heathen have a conscience, but over a long period of time, they can dull that conscience. But I don't think they can always obliterate it. I think it's there telling them what is right and what is wrong. And I don't care if you're in a primitive society or any other one, you show me a person who has committed a crime, and they may do everything they can to justify that crime, but they're always looking like this – to see whose coming after them – because they know what's right and what's wrong.

Little children are the perfect illustration. Why do you think an ungodly family with an ungodly little kid – the kid does something wrong and he comes back, his mother says, "Did you do it?" What's the first thing he does? He lies. Why? Because he knows what he did was what? Was wrong. Even though he maybe never did it before. There's a standard. His conscience tells him that.

The heathen are lost because of creation, conduct, conscience. Fourth, the heathen are lost because of contemplation. Here's another indicator of the lostness of the heathen. "Their thoughts are in the process of accusing or excusing one another." In other words, there is in us the capacity to contemplate or to reason and to determine what someone does is right or wrong. For example, a person without God, without Christ, without the Bible hears about someone who has murdered a child. What is his reaction? Unless the person is totally at the extremity of vileness, he's going to say, "That's awful." He's going to accuse – "We ought to find that person and do something to that person."

Why do you think we have a punitive system in our society? Why do you think there are punitive systems in every society? Because men know what is right and wrong. They have the capacity in their minds to accuse or excuse. They know that's all right, we can excuse that, but not this. The heathen do that. People in our society who are Godless, heathen people fight against crime, don't they? I don't think everybody who is for the death penalty and capital punishment is a Christian, do you? I think there are some people who just think that somebody ought to do something about the crime because it's wrong.

I watched a mother who used profanity on the news, I know she wasn't a Christian, and she said that a man had raped her little girl and killed her and she said, "I want that man to give his life for the life of my daughter that he took." Why? Why did she feel that way? Because there is in her the capacity to contemplate right and wrong and to say this is excusable, this is inexcusable. That's true of the heathen.

The sum of it is this, people: Creation, conduct, conscience, contemplation, what they do, how they deal with the good and bad in their own life and how they deal with it in the lives of others indicates

that they know the law of God as written in them. Now, here is the most important thing I've said yet. The sum of it is this: If they live up to that much light, and they accept that much light, God will reveal to them the full light of Jesus Christ. I believe that with all my heart. You see, that's what it says in Acts 17, "He is not far from us if we would feel after Him." You see? If they would just take what they have and accept that. John 7:17 – mark it down. "If any man wills to do My Father's Will, he shall know of the teaching." If the willing heart is there, he'll know.

We had a living illustration of this in our church the last week, a man by the name of Augustus Marway. Some of you came on Wednesday night and heard his testimony. He is proof positive of this, and I have his testimony, and I'm just going to read a few excerpts from it. This man lived in a village involved in tribal wars. Never put a stitch of clothes on his body until he was 14. In a most aboriginal circumstance in Africa. And this is his own testimony.

I resented it whenever strangers passing through the village were invited to our house. At first Mother allowed me and my two brothers to eat with the guest, but I made a pig of myself, stuffing my mouth with handfuls of rice and grabbing another handful before I could even swallow what I had. Mother was ashamed of me. She wouldn't let me eat with the guests after that. I would just sit and glare at the visitors, making them feel uncomfortable until they would invite me to the table.

From then on, Mother made me sit outside the house until the guests had finished eating. I don't know what made me so incorrigible. In fact, the whole village asked the question, "What's the matter with that son of Marway?" they would ask and my poor parents were at their wits' end.

Even though I loved my mother dearly, I found myself doing terrible things. I can remember seeing her sitting on a bench outside the house and impulsively picking up a stick to throw at her legs. I missed her and struck a little child, hurting him badly.

At times like that, the villagers would join my parents in meting out a punishment. That time, they held me down on the ground by my legs and my arms while they poured a bowl of hot pepper soup down my nose. I nearly choked to death, and for hours afterward my nose burned.

There's a new one for you, mom and dad. If Campbell's only knew. Let me stop in this testimony for a moment. Why did that tribe of aboriginal people who never heard about the true God, who never heard of the gospel, never heard the name Jesus, why did they punish a young boy for throwing a stick and hurting a child? Why? Who told them that was wrong? Why did this young man feel guilty? He told us when he talked to our staff one day, he said, "My heart was broken every day because I loved my mother and I knew she was ashamed of me, but I couldn't correct my behavior." Why did he feel that way? Where did he get to feel that guilt? Where did that come from? And why was his mother ashamed of him? Who told her what the standard was?

He goes on: I couldn’t understand myself. After one of those episodes, I would go off into the forest and pound my head against a tree, crying, “What’s wrong with me? I should kill myself.” I hated being the white sheep of the family.

All depends on your perspective.

He says: But one day when I was about twelve years old, a boy returned to our village from the coast where he had been visiting his father. By the way, that was a long, long, long journey by foot. None of us younger ones had ever seen the ocean, so we crowded around him to hear all about it. It was as though he had been to the moon and back. Enjoying the acclaim, he kept us spellbound with his experiences as he recounted the strange things he saw. Among other things, he told us about how some people on the coast met together in a house on Sundays and they sang and stayed a long time.

He couldn’t figure out what they were doing, and finally his curiosity got the better of him, so he asked one of the villagers, “What do you do in there for such a long time?” They told him they were praying to God, the God who created everything, and they said they believed He heard their prayers.

I had never heard anything like this. A God who hears your prayers? It excited me. And I wanted to pray to God, too. I asked the boy to meet me on Sunday, since that’s the day they met in that house, and we would go someplace outside the village and he could tell me how to pray. But he wasn’t interested. Disappointed, I decided the next Sunday to try it by myself.

I went to a hut that my cousin was still building, and with no one around, I tried to pray for the first time. I had never heard anyone pray, but I decided I would just talk to this God like He was my father. I can’t explain what happened but it was an exciting experience. I wanted to know more about this God, but there was no one in our village who knew anything about Him. So for two years, I kept praying by myself on Sundays and hoping that someday someone would come along who could tell me about Him.

You see? Now, he lived up to the light he had, didn’t he? He followed that light.

About this time, the government started building a motor road to prepare for the new invention called the automobile. And along with many of my relatives, we spent two weeks a month for the next two years building the road under terrible working conditions. Then I went back to Sadore, where I had been born, to stay with my cousin. When I reached Sadore, I made the most wonderful discovery of my entire life for in Sadore there was a house where people met to pray to the God who created the world.

How excited I was. I could hardly wait for Sunday. All night I lay on my mat, waiting for that bell that my cousin said would ring and call us to that house. That morning I sat in the back. I listened to a man tell about God for the first time in my life. I found He was far more wonderful than I had ever imagined. The preacher said that God loved the world so much that He sent His only Son, named Jesus, to take away my sins. I wondered if He knew how terrible I was. I wondered if He knew the awful things I had done back in my village. But the preacher said no matter what I had done, God would forgive me and make my heart clean.

Listen to this next statement.

I knew it was all true.

How did he know that? How did he know that was true? You say, “Well, he went to the counseling room. They gave him a sheet on apologetics.” How did he know that was true? He was following a light God had given him, and that was the next logical step, and his heart was a prepared heart.

Hadn’t this God heard my prayers when I talked to Him and asked Him to help me? Hadn’t He sent me here to Sadore when I didn’t even know He had one of His houses here? I gave my heart to God that morning and it was nice to know He had a Son, too. He was really a father, just like I had been praying to.

You know what happened to that man? That man became the most significant man in the nation of Liberia in our day in founding and building churches.

Do you get the picture? You see, the very – listen to this – the very fact that that could occur proves the heathen have the knowledge if they’ll live up to it. God will be fair, no favorites, but each is responsible for the light he has.

Finally, there’s a sixth principle of judgment, just going to mention. God judges by knowledge, by truth, by guilt, by deeds, by impartiality, and sixthly, by motives. There’s another dimension and these all interface and overlap. They’re not as distinct as I’ve made them in the outline, but they are elements of the act of judgment. God will judge on the basis not only of what a man’s deeds are but what his reasons were. Because you can falsify the deed but you can’t falsify the motive, right? And so verse 16 says, “In the day when God shall judge the” – what? – “secrets of men.” Judgment, you see, will finally reach down into the secret place of motives – of motives.

In 1 Chronicles 28:9, it says, “And thou, Solomon, my son, know thou the God of thy father and serve Him with a perfect heart.” Why? “For the Lord searches all hearts and understands all the imaginations of the thoughts.” “Solomon, my son, serve God from the heart because God knows the heart.” The Psalmist said, “O Lord, thou hast searched me and known me, Thou understandeth my

thought afar off." In that marvelous 139th Psalm, "Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising. There is not a word in my tongue but, Lord, Thou knowest it altogether. Thou hast beset me behind and before and laid Thine hand on me. Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit, whither shall I flee from Thy presence? If I ascend into heaven, Thou art there. If I make my bed in Sheol, Thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning and dell, in the uttermost part of the sea, even there shall Thy hand lead me, and Thy right hand shall hold me. If I say surely the darkness shall cover me, even the night shall be as light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from Thee, but the night shineth as the day. The darkness and the light are both alike to Thee."

In other words, there's nowhere I can go to escape. You know me deep inside. Jeremiah 17:10 puts it this way: "I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind even to give to each according to his ways, according to the result of his deeds." Yes, God judges deeds. Yes, He judges ways. But He judges the motive behind them as well. Jesus said three times in Matthew 6, "The Father who sees in secret will reward you openly." Our inmost secrets may be hidden from human judgment; they are not hidden from God, and we will be judged for our motives.

You either do what you do for the glory of God or you do it for the glory of man. And it all comes to this, people, it'll all be determined – verse 16 – in the day – the day? What day? The day when God shall judge. What day is that? The day when He judges by Jesus Christ, the final day, the ultimate day, the great white throne when all judgment is committed unto Christ. In that glorious climactic culminating day when the Lord Jesus Christ judges, all these criteria will be put to use.

And may I close with a look back at verse 5? If your sin hasn't been dealt with before that day in the blood of Christ, if you haven't confessed Jesus as Lord and accepted His sacrifice on your behalf and His atonement and His payment for your sin, then you are treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath. There's going to be a pile that will damn your soul, and don't think – it says at the end of verse 3 – that thou shalt escape the judgment of God. Let's bow in prayer.

Father, we know that someday the light of divine judgment will throw its beams to illuminate the remotest universe. We know that at that point souls will face the reality of judgment. They will walk, as it were, down a hall of mirrors where every act of their earthly life on all sides is seen and re-seen and they'll be judged. Father, we thank You that in Jesus Christ we never need to face that day because there is therefore now no judgment, no condemning judgment to them who are in Christ Jesus. May it be, Lord, that no one in this place is outside of Christ waiting for the explosion of the wrath of God. We know You'll judge, we shall not escape, but we know that You've already judged Jesus Christ for the sins of those who put their faith in Him. That is our prayer, that those who have not done that will do it even tonight.

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