

No Excuse . . . No Escape

The Perfect Judge Part IV

Romans 2:9-16

Introduction

If you were to ask the top three or four questions that I am asked, not only at church, but as I travel and speak in other parts of the country and the world, without hesitation, I could tell you what those questions are. There are three or four questions that I am asked, no matter where I go. Furthermore, I would be able to tell you, again without hesitation, what the number one question is that I am asked.

The number one question that I am asked is, “What about all the people who have never heard the gospel – are they going to face the judgment of God?”

Recently, I had the privilege of teaching a group of Indian pastors, teachers, and college students in the city of Chennai, India. It is a city of more than ten million people. After one session, an Indian pastor approached me and said, “May I ask you a question?”

I said, “It would be an honor for me to hear your question and attempt to answer.”

He said, “What about all those people who have never heard the gospel – are they under God’s judgment?”

I thought, “Even in India, that is the question that troubles Christians too.”

In our study of Paul’s letter to the Romans, we have been clearly told that all of mankind is guilty and without excuse before the coming judgment. Whether they have ever heard the gospel or not, they will stand before God without excuse. And remember, they will have no excuse before God, not

because of what they did not know, but what they did know, and still refused to accept.

Four Reasons Why There Is No Excuse

Let me give four reasons why there is no excuse.

An unimaginable creation

1. The first reason all the world is without excuse, we were told in chapter 1, is this unimaginable creation. The world has seen it or felt it with its senses. Creation is designed to reveal a designing creator.

According to chapter 1, verses 19 through 21, we are given the truth about the existence of God. Look at those verses.

Because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks; but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

God said, in effect, “I’ve given the world the evidence that I exist – just look around.”

But what does man naturally do with this self-evident truth? He suppresses it, as we are told in verse 18. He refuses to acknowledge it and

speculates and invents other things, in an attempt to explain the created world without having to admit there is a Creator.

Even an unbelieving scientist said recently, in an interview, "The universe just seems tailor made to support life [on earth]; it must have known we were coming."

The universe seems tailor made because it *is* tailor made. And, it did not know we were coming, *He* knew we were coming.

Paul renders the verdict, in verse 20b.

... so ... they are without excuse.

Again, in chapter 2, verse 1a, you read the opening line,

Therefore you are without excuse . . .

This literally means, you have no legal defense that would ever stand the scrutiny of a court or even the sympathy of a jury.

I have felt somewhat sorry for the court appointed attorneys that have been required to represent individuals who have been tied in with the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in America. You have probably heard about one man, an Arab, whose telephone number and other information connecting him to the hijackers was left in the glove compartment of a car one of the hijackers left at the airport. I watched this man's court appointed attorney say to the reporter, as convincingly as he could, "My client just doesn't know how that information ended up in the car."

How would you like that attorney's job?! Your line of defense is, "He just doesn't know how it happened."

Ladies and gentlemen, that is nowhere near the predicament mankind will be in. How foolish the line of defense will be, to say, "I just didn't know there was a creator."

The truth is, every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that which has been suppressed by the pride, disobedience, and depravity of the human heart. All the world will confess, "Jesus Christ is Lord."

The reason the world is without excuse is because of this unimaginable creation that shouts the news, "There is a Designer!"

Now, our text today, in Romans, chapter 2, adds several more reasons why the world is without excuse and will one day face judgment in the presence of the perfect Judge.

An unmistakable composition

2. The second reason the world is guilty and without excuse, according to Holy Scripture, is because of an unmistakable composition.

Let us pick our study up with verses 9 through 15a.

There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek, but glory and honor and peace to everyone who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For there is no partiality with God. For all who have sinned without the Law will also perish without the Law; and all who have sinned under the Law will be judged by the Law; for not the hearers of the Law are just before God, but the doers of the Law will be justified.

Remember, the context in these verses is not salvation, but judgment. The basis for salvation is faith; the basis for judgment is works.

For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts . . .

God has written His law on the hearts of every human being. In other words, every man and woman, boy and girl knows right from wrong intuitively. God has composed the basic truth of His moral law on everyone's heart.

So, the man who never read, "Thou shalt not steal", when he steals, whether he gets caught or not, knows he has done something wrong. The woman who has never read, "Thou shalt not bear false witness", knows intuitively she is wrong when she tells a lie.

I was leafing through the September, 2001, edition of *Sports Illustrated*. I came across an article entitled, "Cheating Is An Age-old Problem In Kid's Sports."

In a world where nothing is absolute truth, where morality is something to be determined by the individual, and where right and wrong are subjective, I found the opening paragraph to be very ironic. The article begins,

There's an old saying in baseball, "It ain't cheatin' unless you get caught." The truth is, though, whether you get caught or not,

cheating is still cheating and still wrong. Sports parents and coaches who circumvent the rules, either to secure a win or give their children extra advantages, are violating the most fundamental law of sports – everybody should play fair.ⁱ

Did you catch some of his vocabulary?

“Cheating is wrong . . . fundamental law . . . the truth is . . .”. He even ends his article by saying,

A victory, no matter how great, always feels hollow if the winner knows he cheated . . . if you compete and cheat, be prepared to suffer the consequences.ⁱⁱ

How is it that the human heart cannot enjoy victory when he has lied, or cheated, or deceived his way to the winner’s circle? How is it that this man can talk about truth, and consequences, and fundamental law? Because he, and everybody else on the planet, has always known that lying is wrong, and cheating is wrong, and murder is wrong, and adultery is wrong, and stealing is wrong, and on and on and on.

How do they know? Paul says, in Romans, chapter 2, verse 15, that God has written a copy of the Law on every man’s heart. And he says, “Whenever man admits to what is right and wrong, he reveals that, even without a copy of the Ten Commandments, he has a copy of the Law inside himself.”

You can go anywhere in the world and you will discover that mankind has devised ways of not only keeping this Law, but punishing offenders of the Law. Mankind also comes up with ways of atoning for the fact that he has not kept the Law. Worshipping the spirits, sacrificing animals, attempting to live moral lives, making and bowing down to idols, withdrawing from society, trying to achieve mental and physical discipline – these are some of the ways man tries to deal with the fact that he knows, instinctively, the Law and he knows, instinctively, that he has broken the Law.

I have watched an Indian priest step into the filthy water of the Ganges River in India and strip to his loin cloth and then, wash himself from his hair to his toes – his attempt to wash his sins away.

That is Paul’s argument. He says, in effect, “Everyone violates that Law, written by God in their hearts, which they instinctively know is truth, and they become a Law unto themselves.”

So, the world is guilty and without excuse because of an unbelievable creation, and because of

this unmistakable composition of divine truth written in their hearts.

An unrelenting conscience

3. Then, thirdly, because of an unrelenting conscience.

Look at verse 15a.

in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness . . .

Paul uses the analogy of a courtroom scene. The lawbreaker is brought forward. The charges of breaking the law are read. Even though the man has never seen a copy of the book of Exodus, or the gospel of Matthew, he knows he has broken the Law. The prosecuting attorney calls his witness to the stand. It is the man’s conscience.

Three witnesses, in fact, will take the stand in verse 15:

- the heart,
- the conscience, and
- the memory (or mind).

So, conscience takes the stand. The man is trembling in fear, hoping that conscience will support his disobedience to this internal Law, and say, “Your Honor, he just didn’t know any better.”

But, the opposite is true. The witness of conscience testifies that this man repeatedly broke the Law, even though conscience told him it was wrong.

Conscience will say, in that day, “Your Honor, I tried to tell him he was doing something wrong, starting when he was a little boy, continuing through his youth, and into his middle years, but he repeatedly told me to ‘pipe down’. He told me over and over again, ‘Keep quiet . . . you’re ruining everything . . . besides, why do I have to listen to you?’ So, eventually, I stopped saying anything at all.”

Mankind is guilty because of an unbelievable creation, an unmistakable composition, and an unrelenting conscience.

An unforgiving consternation

4. And fourthly, an unforgiving consternation.

Notice the latter part of verse 15.

. . . and their thoughts
(their memory),

alternately accusing or else defending them

This is a very interesting insight into every human being,

. . . and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them

What this is saying is that every person has an ongoing dialogue going on inside them. You have done it yourself many times.

You are in the car, driving along, and you are asking yourself, “Okay, now what are we going to do?”

And you answer, “Well, let’s see now, first of all, let’s do this.”

And then you answer that with, “But, wait a second, you forgot about that.”

“Oh, yea, you’re right, I did forget that.”

The good news is, you are not the only person who talks to yourself! And the reason you can converse like that is simply because you are carrying on a conversation between your heart, your conscience, and your memory.

Your heart is saying, “I want to experience that.”

But, your conscience will not go along with that, and says, “But you shouldn’t.”

And, your memory is reminding your heart about the time you experienced that before and, says, “Look what happened as a result.”

Where did this conversation come from – ultimately? God created, within every human being, a resident defense attorney and prosecuting attorney. This constant dialogue either defends your actions or accuses your actions.

Paul, in effect, states that the world will stand before God, not to discover whether or not they are guilty, but to hear Him render a verdict of guilt they already know is true.

Creation has shouted, “There is a Creator!”

And, mankind has said, “There’s got to be another origin.”

Divine composition has declared, “This is the right way and the wrong way to live.”

And, mankind has responded, “I’ll live by what I think is right or wrong.”

Conscience has whispered, “But you know that’s wrong.”

And, man has said, “Keep quiet.”

But, oh, what inner consternation. A battle is fought within every human heart. You cannot keep from remembering, and the older you get, the longer the list of things to remember.

Guilty! By reason of creation, composition, conscience, and consternation.

Is there a battle raging inside of you today?

But someone might say, “God will let me off . . . I’ll get in somehow . . . Surely God understands I’ve tried . . . Surely He would never send a person like me to hell . . . I’ve done some pretty good things in my life . . . I’m sure I’ll be able to escape His wrath.”

I’ve given you four reasons why the world is without excuse.

One Reason Why There Is No Escape

There is one reason there is no escape.

An unavoidable courtroom

1. There is the promise of an unavoidable courtroom.

Look at verse 16.

on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus.

Paul says, “on the day . . .”.

When is that “day”?

He has been speaking in general, throughout this paragraph. What judgment could he be referring to where all the guilty stand before God?

In Revelation, chapter 20, verses 11 through 15, we are told.

And I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. And death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death,

the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

There are several myths that need clearing about this coming judgment, and God, through Christ, Who will judge on this day.

Myths About The Perfect Judge

God will play favorites

1. Myth number one is that God will play favorites.

In other words, God will change the standard for some and go easy for them, "I just need to get on His good side!"

If you look back at Romans, chapter 2, verse 11, you read the truth that erases the myth.

For there is no partiality with God.

The word, translated "partiality," comes from a Greek compound word. One part means, "to accept or to receive," and the other part is a reference to the face. Put together, it meant, "to accept face".

We use the same expression in a variety of ways. We talk of "losing face"; that is, of being embarrassed in society and losing reputation. We talk about "getting face time"; that is, getting time with someone we want to receive attention from.

The Greeks originated the word as a reference to someone who granted favors to someone else because of their reputation or wealth – or, in their language, someone who had "face".

The myth is that God will receive your face because of who you are or because of what you have or have not done. But, the truth is, God is not partial to anyone; He does not accept face. From:

- the civilized to the primitive – guilty!
- the educated to the illiterate – guilty!
- the wealthy to the poor – guilty!
- the upstanding to the criminal – guilty!
- the young to the old – guilty!
- the generous giver to the greedy thief – guilty!
- the religious to the atheist – guilty!
- the well connected to the homeless – guilty!

God will not play favorites on judgment day.

God will judge only those who had a Bible

2. Myth number two is that God will judge only those who had a Bible.

Romans, chapter 2, makes it clear that God will judge people, not by what they did not know, but by what they did with what they knew!

The issue, on the day of judgment, is not, "Did you have a copy of the Ten Commandments?"

The issue, on that day, will be, "Why didn't you obey the Ten Commandments written on your heart?"

Let me point out something in verse 12, where we read,

For all who have sinned without the Law will also perish without the Law, and all who have sinned under the Law will be judged by the Law

The word for "sinned" is in the aorist tense. It does not refer to the fact that the unbeliever has sinned a little here and there. The word means that sin is their choice in life.

William R. Newell translated it that way in order to emphasize the tense of the verb. His translation reads, "For as many as made a life-choice of sin, will be judged by law."ⁱⁱⁱ

It is not that people do not know better, it is that they know internally, intuitively and they choose sin as a way of life anyway.

God will remember that people may not have known any better

3. Myth number three is that God will remember that people may not have known any better.

According to Paul's inspired letter, people did know better – their conscience, their memory convicted them of right and wrong.

Even a sports writer, who would never admit to the Law of God written on the hearts of men, could write in a magazine, with authority, about the law of fair play, and the truth that cheating is wrong, and that breaking the law of fair play brings about a hollow feeling and other consequences.

Is the problem that people just do not know any better? Look at verses 14 and 15a.

For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves,

in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts . . .

The:

- millions in Africa who have never seen a Bible – no excuse and no escape!
- millions in China who have never heard the gospel – no excuse and no escape!
- myriads in America who have never heard the truth – no excuse and no escape!
- millions in India who have never heard the name of Christ – no excuse and no escape!

Why? Because, even without the truth written in their language, they had the truth written on their hearts.

If all of this is true, then there is only one more hope of escape. That is exactly the reason man has concocted myth number four.

God may let some things slide

4. Myth number four is that God may let some things slide.

This is mankind's last gasp of a defense. For some reason, in the heart of even the worst of sinners, is the thought that, "Maybe, just maybe, I'll get off the hook and God will let me into heaven."

But it is a myth.

The truth is even more horrifying. Verse 16 tells us that,

on the day . . . God will judge [even] the secrets of men . . .

God will judge not just the obvious sins, not the sins that everyone knew about, not even the big sins that we admitted to, not even the little sins that we pushed aside and rationalized. No, God is going to go even beyond all of that and uncover all the secrets, the motives, the thoughts, the dreams, and the wishes. At this judgment, God will empty out the closet of every unbeliever!

Hebrews, chapter 4, verse 13, reads,

And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to [give an account].

At this point, Paul does not tell us what the gospel is – that comes later in chapter 3. Oh, thank God for the gospel. But for now, Paul has proven we are all sinners; we are all guilty; we are all condemned; we are all without excuse, and there is

no escaping the judgment of God. All of us have secrets we would never want anyone to know about – and God will reveal it all and judge us.

You do not have any excuse, my friend. You do not have any way of escape.

In Paul's day, there was the belief in the goddess of Justice. She was pictured as a woman who had a bandage over her eyes, so that she could not see the person who came before her for judgment. She would thus be impartial. She carried a set of scales, symbolizing the fact that justice would be given with absolute balance, equity, and precision. In her other hand, she carried a sword that had no scabbard, meaning that she was ready to strike all the guilty alike.

Where did the Greeks get such a picture of a perfect judge like that? It was written on their hearts.

In the courtroom of true and perfect justice, there are no excuses . . . and there is no escape.

A piece of a letter was uncovered by archeologists. Dated in the late second century, it is evidently a letter from a believer to an unbeliever. The believer's name is Theophilus, and he lived in Antioch. His unbelieving friend's name is Autolycus. I do not know if Theophilus had Romans, chapter 2, open before him as he wrote, but his words are incredibly similar. He wrote this to his friend,

To the unbelieving and despisers who obey not the truth, but unrighteousness, when they have been filled with adulteries, and fornications and filthiness, and covetousness and unlawful idolatries, there shall be anger and wrath, tribulation and anguish, and, at the last, everlasting fire shall possess them. You asked me to show you my God – this is my God, and I advise you to fear and to trust in Him."^{iv}

I would say, "Amen," to that, my friend. And, I would add this thought, "You cannot hide from God."

The very first sin, in human history, was the disobedience of Adam and Eve. The Bible tells us that, after they sinned, they hid from God. That is the first time you see the word "hide" in the Bible. When God calls for them to come out of hiding, they tell Him that they hid because they were afraid. That is the first time you see the word "fear" in the Bible.

Ever since then, mankind has attempted to hide from God, in fear because of their sin.

My friend, you cannot hide from God, but you can hide in God, through Jesus Christ, the Lamb who took God's wrath on your behalf; the One who took your punishment for you, whose cup was filled with

your sin against a holy God. And, on the cross, Christ lifted the cup to His lips and drank your damnation dry.

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ⁱ Rick Wolff, "Cheating Is An Age-old Problem In Kid's Sports," Sports Illustrated, (Sep., 2001).

ⁱⁱ Ibid.

ⁱⁱⁱ William R. Newell, Romans, p. 61

^{iv} Ancient Christian Commentary on the Scriptures, p. 60