

God's Measuring Stick
2 Corinthians 10:12, 17-11:3
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3/10/13

Note: The text below was prepared for oral delivery rather than for publication in print. As such, be aware that sentence fragments are intentionally used and that this document has not been edited to correct the errors in grammar, sentence structure, etc.

- I. Introduction: Our text today is taken from 2 Corinthians, chapters 10 and 11, and while you turn there, I'll begin with an illustration from my past.
- A. As many of you know, I began my career here in Albany as an engineer with one of our large manufacturing plants. Subsequent to that, I decided to start my own engineering firm along with what became my business partner for some 26 years. And over those years, we enjoyed a measure of success – a success I attribute first and foremost to God as all things ultimately come from Him. But in applying our God-given abilities, I believe that one of our company's greatest strengths came from our insistence on a "customer focus" rather than a "product focus." That simply means we made it a priority to align ourselves with the objectives of our clients with a determination to execute our work with an excellence consistent with their needs.
- B. An example of this "customer focused" mindset in action was reflected in how we responded to client requests for proposals – in hopes of being selected to execute a given project on their behalf. My partner and I spent considerable time coaching our leadership on this, explaining how if they would listen closely, the customers themselves would telegraph that which was most important in their pre-bid presentations – in essence giving us the critical answers that needed to be addressed in a winning proposal. So instead of merely rehashing our company's history, its various strengths and successful experiences as is typically included in such proposals, we would insist on tailoring ours in alignment with that which really mattered – not necessarily that which we thought to be most important – but that which was most important in the eyes of the one making the judgment as to who would be awarded the job. That mindset definitely contributed to the success our company enjoyed over the years.
- C. But there is a much more important judgment than that which was made by our customers that affected our temporal welfare. I'm speaking of the judgment of God – the judgment concerning our eternal welfare. Oftentimes in our business, we dealt with multiple client representatives who sometimes had different criteria from one another as to what mattered to them. So in that case we also had to discern whose judgment among them would carry the most weight in awarding the project. But we don't have that problem when it comes to the judgment concerning our eternal destiny for there is only one judge of all the earth. As the last part of Genesis 18:25 declares, "...*Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?*" So we only have one Judge to deal with and as we see in this rhetorical question of scripture, He shall do right.

- D. Now in my business, on the occasions that our discernment was flawed as to how our client would judge our proposal, we might fail to win the job. But an error in our discernment of God's standard of judgment, has eternal consequences. There's far more at stake than being awarded a project that's here today and gone tomorrow. So let's not take for granted our own understanding of the standard by which God shall judge us all. This has a bearing on our eternal destiny. An eternity in heaven's glory or an eternal damnation in hell's misery is at stake so let us be diligent to examine ourselves, keeping in mind God's declaration concerning all of us by nature, in the lost state of darkness into which we all are born. In Romans 3:11a He declares that "***There is none that understandeth...***" But oh what a blessing it is to be given an understanding that we might comprehend and embrace God's standard of judgment.
- E. This is the subject we will consider this morning. We all measure things by some standard. We use a tape measure or a yard stick as our standard to measure the length of something. Like me you may have heard an older craftsman at work tell their helper, "Hand me that measuring stick." Well, this morning we're going to consider "God's Measuring Stick," as I've titled today's message.
- F. And the good news is that we have at our disposal the plain and precise declaration of God's measuring stick – of His standard of eternal judgment. And we will examine that today from God's Word. And this is important because it doesn't matter what I say, or what this preacher may say, or even what feels right or seems right to you concerning how you think God will judge you. We must be brought to see what God says and by God-given faith humbly submit to and adopt His standard as our own.
- G. Unlike the illustration from my engineering business, your discernment and willingness to embrace how God will judge you cannot be influenced by my coaching, by any man's persuasion, even by man's preaching the truth apart from the grace of God and the miraculous gift of spiritual life whereby you are able to gain an understanding. As Christ proclaimed in I Corinthians 2:14, "***... the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.***" I pray that God the Holy Spirit will so bless all who hear this message that they might spiritually discern the things of God so as to embrace God's measuring stick.
- H. And today I am going to attempt to set forth God's standard of judgment from God's Word, knowing that not only does the preaching of the Gospel from God's Word provide us information, the open-book answer as to how God judges, but it is by that same preached Gospel from His Word that the Holy Spirit quickens sinners – gives them spiritual life. The scripture refers to God's Word as "the word of life," just as the Psalmist expressed in Psalm 119:50 saying, "***...for thy word <God's word> hath quickened me.***"

II. 2 Corinthians 10: So let's begin our consideration from God's Word in 2 Corinthians, chapter 10 where Paul is warning of measuring by the wrong standard – using the wrong measuring stick. First a little background on the context...

A. Background: One of the apparent reasons that Paul wrote this letter to the Corinthians was that false apostles who sought to undermine Paul's authority and discredit the Gospel had made charges against him and his ministry. So Paul thought it necessary to vindicate both his message and his authority before he visited Corinth. Now this is the context from which our passage today is taken. As we reach chapter 10, Paul is refuting the false and malicious accusations that these false teachers had made against him and his ministry. But in the process of addressing these accusations, Paul gives a detail description concerning the nature of a true Gospel ministry in contrast to that which is false. And as we get to verse 12, he specifically and clearly contrasts the different standard by which these false preachers judged.

B. Beginning in 2 Corinthians 10:12, we read, ***“For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.”*** So the Apostle declares of these false preachers and false ministries that they commend themselves as they measure themselves by themselves. And he says that in so doing they are not wise. That phrase translated ***“are not wise”*** refers to more than a mere suggestion that they could perhaps be a little smarter, not being quite as wise as others in how they judged. No, it goes beyond that. A more literal translation of that phrase would be that they ***“are without understanding,”*** just as Paul describes us all in our natural, state of spiritual darkness when he said, ***“There is none that understandeth.”***

C. So those who are not wise, who are without an understanding (as describes us all prior to the revelation of God-given faith and belief of God's Gospel) are said to measure themselves by themselves, and to compare themselves among themselves, exposing that they "understand not." So they are judging in ignorance of God's standard of judgment and unable to form a right judgment of themselves. John Gill described the foolishness of so judging, likening it to a dwarf measuring himself by himself, only surveying his own dimensions (or those of other dwarfs) so as to fancy himself a giant. And when it comes to the Gospel, the subject which Paul is addressing, to be not wise but foolish and ignorant of that, to die without the understanding of God's standard of judgment describes an eternal tragedy for them.

D. I also want to point out that the word “measuring” as it is translated in verse 12 is altogether different and not derived from the same word “measure” as is used in the verses that follow, verses 13-16, where its reference there is to lines or boundaries.

Remember in the context, Paul is also describing the false preachers who would cross lines or boundaries as they would take credit for some of the results achieved by true Gospel ministries such as that of Paul and the other Apostles. But here in vs. 12, the word “measuring” is more consistent with our common usage of the word, meaning to ascertain in extent, degree, size (to make a measurement as we commonly think of it) according to a standard. And that is what all religion does. But false religion invariably prompts men to measure themselves by themselves, to compare themselves among themselves, and thereby to commend themselves. And Paul tells them – this is not wise – it is foolish, it to lack the vital understanding of how God judges things.

III. God’s Measuring Stick: Well we see from verse 12, the flawed measuring stick of those who remain in spiritual ignorance. So what is God’s measuring stick – by what standard does He judge?

A. Well in the very context of 2 Corinthians we can see something of this. In Paul’s stark contrast of true Gospel ministries with those that are false, he had said, beginning back in verse 3, that ***“For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: <as those whose judgments are of the flesh, in the comparison of one sinner with another sinner> ⁴(For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) ⁵Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;”*** When we bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, we thereby make our judgments accordingly.

So, the standard is not my obedience, my sincerity about my faith, my faithfulness to serve others or my church, my involvement in religion. No, the standard is the obedience of Christ, that to which my every thought is to be brought captive. That’s how I should judge because that’s the standard by which God judges – the obedience of Christ. Why, I stand up pretty good in comparison to some of the rascals I’m acquainted with, but I would not want to be judged based upon my own personal conduct as measured against the standard of the obedience of Christ – as if my obedience could measure up to that of the sinless Lord of Glory. But that’s the standard by which God judges. And I’ll show you this more definitively as we go forward.

B. We also see that Christ is the issue if we look further down in 2 Corinthians 10. Paul continued his defense in verses 13 - 16, but he summarizes much of what he’s taught in the last couple of verses of this chapter. Skipping down to verses 17 and 18, we read, ***“But he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord. ¹⁸For not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth.”***

To glory refers to that of which we would have room to boast, the basis of our confidence. Clearly those who measure themselves by themselves must be glorying (or placing their confidence in) themselves, based upon that flawed standard by which they measure. But Paul writes here, ***“But he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.”*** If we measure ourselves by ourselves, or by other sinners like us, then to the extent we measure up, we thereby commend ourselves. We all can find someone we can compare ourselves with so as to imagine we must deserve commendation. But Paul writes here that God will not approve of such self-commendation, but rather He approves of those whom He commends. Who are they?

- C. For God’s answer to that, read with me what Paul wrote to true believers, beginning in Romans 5:8 where he wrote, ***“But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹Much more then, being now justified <that means to be declared not guilty> by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.”*** Who are the ones whom God commends? It is all of those for whom Christ died, who are justified (judged not guilty) by His blood. So these are saved, not based upon anything proceeding from them, but saved through Him.
- D. We get further commentary on God’s measuring stick as Paul continues this discourse in Chapter 11, expressing his fear that some of the Corinthians might be corrupted by those promoting a false standard of judgment. Beginning in verse 1 he writes, ***“Would to God ye could bear with me a little in my folly: <the folly of having to defend himself> and indeed bear with me. ²For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. ³But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.”*** As some of you know, that word translated “simplicity” means the singleness or the singularity of Christ. He, His Person and work of obedience, that’s the one and only standard. That’s God’s measuring stick! Remember, Paul had just written of how we are to bring ***“...into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;”*** (Romans 10:5b) – the singleness of Christ and His obedience, that alone.
- E. I think perhaps the clearest declaration of God’s standard of judgment is found in Acts 17, where at the end of verse 30 Paul writes how God ***“.. now commandeth all men every where to repent:<Why?> ³¹Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.”***

So here God tells us that His standard of judgment is righteousness. Whose righteousness? That man whom God has ordained, meaning the One God the Father appointed and predestinated to this purpose. Who is He? It's the One He raised from the dead – His only begotten Son, the God-man, the Lord Jesus Christ. And we're told that by that resurrection, assurance is proclaimed to all men – assurance that this is precisely how the world will be judged. You must measure up to His righteousness – that which He established by His perfect obedience unto death. And only that, His perfect righteousness, can (and did) satisfy the requirements of a holy God so as to demand life. His resurrection insures a resurrection from the dead (both a spiritual one, and an eternal one) for all those for whom He lived and died.

F. Many remain ignorant of or refuse to acknowledge and / or embrace this righteousness as God's strict standard of judgment. But I hope you can see that if you're among that number, your argument is not with me, but with God for these passages could not be any clearer. Look in Isaiah 28, verse 17a where God, speaking through His Prophet says, "***Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet: ...***" The word "plummet" here is akin to a carpenter's plumb line. That's a string with a weight on the end so that it can be hung and the weight dangled, providing a standard to measure to insure something is what is said to be plumb – perfectly vertical. God is saying here that righteousness is His measuring stick. Any deviation from that line, the perfect righteousness of Christ, misses the mark. It does not measure up.

IV. Righteousness: Well, let's be sure we are correctly understanding what this "righteousness," God's measuring stick, means.

A. For that let's go back again to Romans 3 and pick up in verse 20 where we read, "***Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified*** <that means declared not guilty, righteous> ***in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.*** ²¹***But now the righteousness of God without the law*** <without your obedience to it> ***is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets;*** ²²***Even the righteousness of God which is by faith*** <or the faithfulness> ***of Jesus Christ unto all*** <i.e. – declared or preached to all> ***and upon all*** <that is put upon, imputed or credited to their account – to whose account? Upon all...> ***them that believe: for there is no difference:*** ²³***For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;*** <See the foolishness of one sinner judging themselves by another sinner, imagining themselves to be saved by their decision to believe something that someone else would not. No, there is no difference in these to whom God commends by imputing His righteousness to them.

He continues His description of these to whom He commends His love adding ...> ²⁴***Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption*** <the blood payment made in full due unto their sins. They are bought. The redemption...> ***that is in Christ Jesus: ²⁵Whom God hath set forth***<He ordained, He determined or predestinated > ***to be a propitiation*** <that refers to the appeasement of God's just wrath against sin that was made by His sin bearing sacrifice of Himself, propitiation...> ***through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness*** <His perfect satisfaction to the Father's law and justice, His righteousness...> ***for the remission of sins that are past***, <meaning even the sins of the Old Testament believers who came before Him> ***through the forbearance of God; ²⁶To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. ²⁷Where is boasting then? It is excluded...***"

B. This righteousness is the merit of Christ's finished work of obedience unto death on the cross – the perfect satisfaction He made to God's law and justice on behalf of / as a Substitute for otherwise guilty, hell deserving sinners, such as you and me – a satisfaction made to both the precepts and penalties of God's law. He perfectly obeyed but He was doing so for sinners. And so He bore the just penalty due unto all the sins that were imputed or charged to Him, all the sins of all those for whom He lived and died.

C. To see how important this righteousness of God in Christ is, hear God's Word in Romans 10, beginning in verse 1 where Paul writes, ***"Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved.*** <In other words, Paul is saying they are lost. Why?> ²***For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God,*** <they are religious> ***but not according to knowledge.*** <They are not wise, They are without understanding. What is the understanding they lack?> ³***For they being ignorant of God's righteousness,*** <the very standard by which He shall judge the world, so by default, they must measure by themselves as He continues saying...> ***and going about to establish their own righteousness,*** <trying to meet some presumed condition or requirement to make the difference in their salvation – self-righteousness. As such, they...> ***have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.*** <Describing those who have not submitted and embraced His righteousness, God's measuring stick, as their measuring stick, as their only hope of salvation. But notice what He says of the true believer as He continues in verse 4 saying...> ⁴***For Christ is the end*** <the finishing or fulfillment> ***of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.***"

V. Measuring by the Wrong Standard:

A. Now like all of us who start out ignorant of God's standard, ignorant and / or not submitted to the righteousness of God in Christ, in that spiritual ignorance, in our lack of understanding we too once were among those Paul described as unwise, measuring themselves by themselves, not by God's measuring stick – His righteousness. But in ignorance (in spiritual darkness), apart from being given the eyes of faith, we don't recognize how tragically flawed we are in making our judgments concerning eternal life, saved and lost, heaven and hell. Perhaps it will be helpful if we review how certain widely held perspectives or doctrinal views actually expose someone to be continuing to measure by the wrong standard.

B. The Indifferent: First, consider those who are indifferent, who don't take the time to seriously consider their spiritual state and eternal destiny. I know that many in this category presume it will all work out for them in the end. They might look at some who call themselves "Christian" and in some cases, they know some things they've done that would expose they are not all they are cracked up to be. And so they might reason with themselves, "Well, I know if he's going to heaven, I'm sure I'll be okay too. Compared to some, I stack up pretty well. I'm not such a bad guy." No doubt, that's one sinner comparing himself with another sinner. But sadly, that's not how God will judge you. And yet as long as they continue in that indifference they see no need to flee to Christ as a mercy beggar, in need of the perfect righteousness by which God shall judge us all.

C. The Free-Will Arminian: Well, secondly, what about the more popular version of today's so-called "Christianity" in which millions are taught (and believe) that God loves all and that Jesus Christ died for all? Now given their agreement with the Biblical truth that multitudes shall perish in hell, it should be obvious that those of that persuasion are misjudging how God judges. If one presumes that Christ died to pay the sin debt for even one person who God will then sentence to hell anyway, then clearly something else (something other than Christ and His blood sacrifice) must make the real difference by their way of thinking.

Now many of these would deny that they are among those who measure themselves by one another, yet clearly according to their own doctrine, they must judge based upon something about them (whether it is what they have done that others will not do, or what they have refrained from doing that others have done, perhaps their so-called decision for Jesus that others would not make, perhaps their life of dedication to their faith as they do their best to live according to God's commands – that which others have not pursued, or perhaps as I would have put it – I believe and they won't).

Regardless of what it is, don't you see that by the process of elimination, if the ultimate, determining factor in your salvation is judged to be anything other than Christ and His perfect righteousness, then it's got to be something you find true of yourself that you are presuming to make the real difference? And so, these too are included among those who Paul declares are not wise, who lack understanding, who commend themselves as they measure themselves by themselves and not according to God's measuring stick – the perfect righteousness of God in Christ.

D. The Compromising Calvinist: Well, lastly what about those who concur with the clear, irrefutable truth of scripture that Christ did not die for all, but rather He died for a particular people, those referred to as God's elect – chosen by God from all eternity according to His own purpose and will? Sadly, many (even most) who acknowledge the truth of particular redemption, expose their lack of understanding as they still fail to adopt and judge according to God's standard of judgment (His righteousness). This is exposed by what may outwardly appear to be their kind and compassionate assessment of those I just described – those who still believe Christ died for all. I hope you see that any who hold to a universal view of Christ's death actually thereby deny the effectual, justifying redemption by the shed blood of Christ, whether they recognize that to be so or not.

But many who have learned better on this point of doctrine, really do not consider it to be such a big deal. They readily can agree to disagree on this point of doctrine. Many of them actually count themselves as having been regenerated, born again believers at a time in their past when they likewise denied that Christ's blood effectually redeemed all for whom it was shed. But I hope you see this as vital to the doctrine of the Gospel that is believed upon unto salvation. This is life and death. And to so judge exposes that likewise, these 'compromising Calvinists' (for the lack of a better name) are not submitted to the righteousness of God because clearly they too have judged that something other than Christ's finished work of righteousness on the cross must make the real difference if they can count themselves and / or others among the saved while in their ignorance of (or while refusing to submit to and embrace) His righteousness as the only basis upon which our just and holy God (can and does) save any sinner. So, likewise, these are not measuring by God's measuring stick. By the process of elimination, in judging that anyone could be saved based on something other than Christ and His imputed righteousness alone, they expose themselves to be among those without an understanding, who commend themselves as they too continue to measure themselves by themselves.

VI. Closing:

A. How does His righteousness become Mine?: Before we close I would be remiss if I failed to clearly set forth how God could bestow His eternal blessing on a sinner if (as we have seen clearly from God's Word) He truly judges by the strict perfect standard of His own righteousness, that which Christ rendered in complete and full satisfaction to the justice of God by His perfect obedience unto death. He rendered it. I didn't. I'm a sinner and fall way short of that mark. So how can God save any sinner? Well, for the answer to this, look again to God's Word.

1. First, in Romans 4, where beginning in verse 6, we read of David's description of "*...the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works,* <This simply refers to those to whose account God reckoned or credited His perfect righteousness without any contributing work whatsoever of theirs being involved. That's what grace is – the antithesis of works. He puts to their account the very merit of the perfect satisfaction to God's justice which Christ accomplished for them by His obedience unto death. David's quote continues in verse 7...> ⁷*Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered.* ⁸*Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.*" Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not charge with his or her sins. How can a holy and just God forgive me and not charge me with my sins if it is without works, if I, as a sinner, can do nothing to deserve this blessing?
2. Well in 2 Corinthians 5:21, we have that answer as Paul writes to the believers there saying, "*For he <God the Father> hath made him <God the Son> to be sin for us, <He> who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.*" - In Christ. God the Father made Christ, who in Himself was perfectly sinless, to be sin for all those for whom He died. God does not impute or charge His adopted children with their sins because they were all charged or imputed to Christ. The entire demerit of all of their sins was put to His account that He, by His infinitely precious blood might pay the penalty due unto them before the infinite, holy justice of God the Father. And in turn, God the Father imputed His righteousness, the merit of Christ's perfect satisfaction to the Father's law and justice, to their account. What a glorious exchange! He died for sins He had no part in producing that they might possess a perfect righteousness they had not part in producing.

B. But You Must Believe! Often when someone first hears of God's strict standard of judgment, His righteousness, they will reply, "Well, I can't refute what you are saying but all I know is God also says if I believe then I am saved. Does it not say that those who believe the Gospel shall be saved? And I believe the gospel." Well in answer to that, I agree that those who believe God's Gospel are saved. But consider what it means to truly believe God's Gospel.

1. Romans 1:16-17: In Romans 1, verse 16, we are told that the Gospel "...*is the power of God unto salvation...*," but in verse 17, it tells us why it is, saying "...*for therein is the righteousness of God revealed.*" So unless one's eyes have been opened to God's measuring stick, to have His righteousness revealed unto them so as to see their desperate need for His righteousness to have been imputed to their accounts, they are just fooling themselves in presuming that they believe the Gospel – for clearly that could not be God's Gospel – not the Gospel that is the power of God unto salvation because therein (in that Gospel) His righteousness is revealed. Any who profess to believe on Christ or to believe God's Gospel, while ignorant or not submitted to His righteousness imputed to the sinner as the only ground or basis upon which any can be saved, or just fooling themselves just as we saw in God's Word from the opening verses of Romans 10.
2. Romans 10:9-10a: Sadly that describes most who profess to be of the "Christian" faith. They will often quote Romans 10:9 which reads, "*That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.*" And they stop right there and proclaim that in spite of all scripture we reviewed this morning, they know they are saved simply because they have confessed Christ and believe on Him from the heart, believing that God raised from the dead. But to these I say just read one verse further for in verse 10 it tells us "*For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; ...*"

Righteousness – That's God's measuring stick!

Footnote from the author: While this sermon was prepared and delivered by me, I often utilize the commentaries, study helps, and teachings of others to supplement my own prayerful study of the scriptures. Since this document was not originally prepared for publication in print, please excuse and recognize that it was unfeasible to properly identify and credit all of the various original sources used to develop the content herein. Ultimately, it is my sincere and foremost objective to accurately present the gospel of God's grace found in the only infallible source, God's word itself – the Bible.