

August 8, 2021

# What God Will Say on Judgment Day

Romans 3:19-20

BI: By the Works of the Law no human being will be justified in God's sight.

LTS: Luke 18:9-23

It is by the happy providence of God I have a dear friend who for many years served as a prosecuting attorney in federal court. One day over lunch I asked him if it would ever be appropriate for me to bring a couple of my sons into the court room to watch him do his thing. It would not only be interesting, but it would fulfill a Boy Scout badge requirement. To our delight he invited us to come.

On the appointed day we went to the courthouse and sure enough there was a significant drugs and firearms case taking place. My sons and I were captivated by what we saw and heard.

After a few hours of watching, there was a lunch break, and during that hour my friend asked the boys for any questions or observations. One of them asked a question I had not thought to ask. He said, I noticed that just to the left of the Judge's bench there appears to be a metal door, but I never saw anyone go through it.

"O," my friend said, That's a good question. You see, at the end of the day, if you happen to be the person being accused, the one thing you dread most of all is the possibility that you will be escorted through that door. Why? Well, because that door leads directly into the jail. Once you pass through that door, you will not come back. What a terrible prospect!

I thought about that this week because the Apostle Paul, through the early chapters of his letter to the Romans, is serving as the prosecuting attorney not merely against the Jews, but against all mankind. He begins in Romans 1:18 where we read,

*For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth.*

From that initial statement all the way to our text this morning at the end of chapter three, Paul presents God's case against all people. He lays out the evidence, accuses them of the crime, and announces the final sentence of judgment. But, as you know by now, Paul is not doing all of this to spite the Jews or the Gentiles. To the contrary, his mission is to awaken the accused to their hopeless case so they will cast themselves on the mercy of the court.

For the apostle Paul, this is not an exercise in intellectual gamesmanship. It is a real life-and-death drama that will end either in eternal judgment in Hell or eternal life in the very presence of God.

For those who are too proud to throw themselves on the mercy of the court, there is coming a day that the N.T. refers to as the great White Throne Judgement. Let me read a couple verses from Rev. 20 (11-12)

The apostle John writes,

Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. <sup>12</sup> And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done.

This is the event that Paul is most concerned about when he thinks of the lost Jews and Greeks who lived in Rome. And the reason he is so concerned is because whether one is Jewish or Gentile, every human being must stand trial for their crimes against the King. In fact, the Judge has already declared that every one of them is scheduled to be escorted through the door, as it were, to the left of the bench never to return.

What we have in our text for this morning is an explanation of something more terrifying than anything we can imagine. Paul is talking about the future; an inevitable guilty verdict for all who die suppressing the truth of God in unrighteousness.

If you have not repented of your sin and cast all your hope upon the finished work of Jesus Christ on your behalf, Paul means to warn you of what God will say to you when you stand in the dock before His judgement seat.

To help us walk through this passage in a systematic manner, I have divided the passage into 4 statements that summarize what sinners should look forward to hearing in court on that final judgment day. But before dig into these frightening words, let's stand together and read the text in its context.

Read Rom. 3:9-20

*What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, <sup>10</sup> as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; <sup>11</sup> no one understands; no one seeks for God. <sup>12</sup> All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one." <sup>13</sup> "Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive." "The venom of asps is under their lips." <sup>14</sup> "Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness." <sup>15</sup> "Their feet are swift to shed blood; <sup>16</sup> in their paths are ruin and misery, <sup>17</sup> and the way of peace they have not known." <sup>18</sup> "There is no fear of God before their eyes." <sup>19</sup> Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those*

*who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. <sup>20</sup> For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.*

He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

The author of the book of Hebrews tells us that “it is appointed unto man to die once and after that the judgment.” You have an appointment with God. It is an appointment that you will most certainly NOT miss. You don’t know when your appointment will come, but it is coming. And when it comes there will be no time to prepare. You will not be late this appointment and whatever God says to you in those few moments will be the final verdict on your life.

What Paul wants us to understand, however, is that if you depart this world separated from Christ, the first statement you will hear will from the Judge will go something like this.

## I. You are hopelessly guilty (19)

1. As I said, Paul has been warning us about this from all the way back in chapter one. It was there that he warned the Gentiles of this eventuality. Then, in chapters 2-3, Paul turns to the Jews with the same message; “You are hopelessly guilty.
2. To a world of people who have been taught all their lives that they are fundamentally good, the word of the Lord comes with strikingly powerful accusations. Of course, the things he says about humanity is hard to hear, but the Jews would be especially offended by this description. After all, they were God’s chosen people. They had divine privileges that no other people group in the world possessed. And the most important of those privileges was that Yahweh had entrusted to them the very “oracles of God,” the enscriptured Word.
3. Paul, however, took great pains to show them that their ultimate salvation and entrance into the kingdom of heaven was not based upon their Jewishness, their spiritual privileges, or even their efforts to obey the law of God. And as always, Paul presented these disturbing truths by appealing to Scripture.
4. You may remember from last time that every example of human depravity Paul mentions (9-18) were grounded in specific O.T. tests. That is, they all came from “The oracles of God” which the Jews exclusively possessed.
5. This is what Paul is referring to when he says (19) “Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law.

A. The phrase “*Now we know,*” indicates that this is something that the Jews would

agree with; namely, that whatever the O.T. Scriptures say (whether positive or negative) it says to those who are under the law.

- B. The Jews would have understood this implicitly. Paul is speaking about his fellow Jews. They were the blessed recipients of God's law, but they also lived under its authority. They would agree with this in principle, but they had a hard time believing that everything Paul said about human depravity applied to them. And yet, every word he said was lifted directly out of the Psalms and the prophet Isaiah. The very oracles of God prove that Jewish sinners are under the wrath of God.
- C. We could say it this way: The Jews stood guilty before God because they had the word of God written in a book; namely, the O.T. Scriptures. They knew that what God required at the very minimum was that they "Love the Lord their God with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength – and their neighbor as themselves. But they didn't do it. They broke God's law at every point.
- D. The Gentiles didn't have God's written law in a book, but as we learned in Rom. 2:15, They had the law "written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them. That is, they were all born with a conscience that encouraged them when they did what was right and accused them when they did wrong.
- E. So, the Jews were guilty for breaking God's written law, and the Gentiles were guilty for breaking the law written on their hearts.
- F. So, when Paul says that "whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law; namely, EVERYONE without exception.
- G. What did the law of God say about the Jews? As Paul has taken great pains to explain, the Law says the Jews are guilty and without excuse.
- H. What did the law of God say to the Gentiles? It says, you are guilty and without excuse.

5. We know this is what Paul is saying because back in verse 9 Paul reminded his readers that, "We have already charged that all, both Jews and Gentiles, are under sin." That is, they are under the tyrannical rule of sin. They are slaves to sin. We are all sinners by birth and sinners by choice. We are all guilty in the eyes of God.

- A. Incidentally, the word "Charged" is a legal term. It's part of the vocabulary of the court room.
- B. More specifically, it is a word that would be most frequently used by a prosecuting attorney. His job is to accuse the sinner. Moreover, his charges are true, as evidenced by what the O.T. repeatedly taught.

6. So here we all stand. God's bailiff enters the court and cries, "The court is in session. Order, order. The Lord is in his holy temple. Let all the earth be silent before Him."

7. And the first thing a sinner will hear when he suddenly and perhaps unexpectedly, appears before the judgment seat of Christ.

You are Hopelessly Guilty.

The second words you will hear from the judge goes something like this:

## II. You have no defense: (v. 19)

1. Notice what Paul says in the next phrase of v. 19. *“So that every mouth may be stopped and the whole world may be held accountable.”* As Paul prosecuted his case that all men are sinners, the Jews came to their own defense:

- A. But God, I kept the Sabbath every Sabbath.
- B. But God I maintained and obeyed the dietary laws.
- C. But God I went to synagogue and sent my children there to learn Tora.
- D. God, I remembered the poor and helped other people as I could.
- E. I didn't steal, murder, or take your name in vain.

2. In our time and culture it may sound more like this:

- A. But God, I have always been a good person! At least, I'm less sinful than the people I hear about in the news every evening.
  - B. But God, my Pastor told us every week that You are all mercy and love, patience and forgiveness.
  - C. But God, I've been on mission trips I've gone to seminary. That's got to count for something, right!
  - D. I attended church most weeks and was generous with my church family.
2. All of those things are good, but none of them – none of your religious works - has the power to save a sinner or bring him into reconciliation with God. None of it can wash away our guilt and sin. As we have learned repeatedly in Romans, “There is a righteousness we desperately need, don't have, and can't earn.” None of us is born righteous and no one can measure up to the righteousness God possesses and requires. It is now time to close the case on all mankind.
3. William Hendriksen draws a vivid picture when he writes. There is nothing more man can say in his defense.

Everybody is standing in front of God, the judge. The records are read, and as it were, one by one the accused are given an opportunity to answer the charges made against them. However, their guilt having been exposed,

they have no answer. Their mouths are silenced, stopped.<sup>1</sup>

4. What will God say on Judgment day?
  - A. You are hopelessly guilty
  - B. You have no defense
  - C. And third...

### III. Your sentence has already been declared

1. God has a purpose in all of this. Paul says it is “so that every mouth will be closed and the whole world may become accountable to God.”

- A. The word “accountable” is important here. This is the only place in the N.T. where it is used. It is a legal term that refers to a criminal who has already been found guilty and the judge has passed down his sentence. It is the equivalent to being placed on death row without any prospect of appeal.<sup>2</sup>
- B. This is reminiscent of Jesus’ words in John 3:18

*Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.*

- C. Again, John 3:36, “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.”

3. You see, my friend, one implication of Paul’s words here is that if there is ever going to be hope for your salvation you must stop defending yourself. You need to fire your internal defense attorney. This is your only acceptable recourse. The apostle John assures us that “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us of all unrighteousness.”<sup>3</sup>

4. Do you know what the word “confess” means in the original language? It means “to say the same thing.” You will know that you are truly repentant when you begin evaluating your sin the way God evaluates your sin. You will know you’re repentant when you stop defending yourself and begin owning the fact that in your heart you are just what verses 9-18 says you are in the

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<sup>1</sup> William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Paul’s Epistle to the Romans. New Testament Commentary*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1980), 125

<sup>2</sup> Tom Pennington, Countryside Bible Church, audio message on Rom. 3:19-20.

<sup>3</sup> 1 John 1:9

eyes of God. For your own good... for your own eternal well-being, for your own salvation, for the glory of God in your own everlasting joy Paul is pleading with you to

- A. stop talking
- B. Stop making excuses for your sin
- C. Stop blaming others
- D. Stop saying it's not fair.
- E. It's time to bow your head and close your mouth, and humbly confess all your sin. Your sentence has already been passed down and baring a divine act of mercy, your judgment is a sure thing.

5. Twice already in Romans Paul declared that Jews and Gentiles are without excuse. He says it in 1:20 and 2:1. Your sentence has already been passed down.

What will God say on Judgment Day?

- A. You are hopelessly Guilty
- B. You have no defense
- C. Your sentence has already been declared, and finally... Just in case you are holding out hope that your record of obedience to God's law can still save you, God says,

#### IV. The Law cannot save you.

Read v. 20

*For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.*

1. If you are looking for a way of salvation from the righteous wrath of God, don't look to the law of Moses for help. The purpose of the Law is NOT to save you. The purpose of the Law is to show us our sin.

- A. On Christmas day this year I came down with a debilitating case of Covid-19. One of the first things the doctors did was to take an X-ray of my chest to see how badly my lungs were fairing.
- B. When I brought the image home later that day I showed to my kids. One of them pointed at my shoulder in the image and said, "Dad, what's that? It looks like a screw! And that's exactly what it was.
- C. When I was in my late 20's I had reconstructive surgery on my shoulder. I had told the kids many times about having a screw in my shoulder, but they never saw it until I had the X-Ray.
- D. The Law of God is like that X-Ray machine. It can do nothing to cure the problem, but it can reveal what had previously been invisible. The apostle Paul is attempting to awaken us to the problem within. It is a terminal disease that is brought to light by the X-Ray machine of God's law.

2. The question is, how will you respond to this knowledge? Will you claim that everything is fine and there's nothing to worry about? Or will you believe the diagnosis the word of God has declared. Or to use commensurate legal terms, Jesus said,

Matthew 5:25–26

*<sup>25</sup> Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison. <sup>26</sup> Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.*

5. This is the “Bad News of the Gospel. The Good News, however, is that Jesus Christ has fully paid for all your sin with His precious blood. All you have to do is surrender. Bring all you sin to Him. Believe that what He says about your sin is absolutely true and then. And then, through yourself on the mercy of the Court.
6. If you do, you will soon discover that the Righteous Judge is now your loving Father.
7. The way Paul describes the Good news goes like this:

Romans 3:21–26

<sup>21</sup> But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, ... the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe... We are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,

8. But if you want to know more about that you'll need to come back next week.

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9. Here's how the hymn-writer puts it:

What can wash away my sin  
Nothing but the blood of Jesus  
What can make me whole again  
Nothing but the blood of Jesus

Oh, precious is the flow  
That makes me white as snow  
No other fount I know  
Nothing but the blood of Jesus

By the Works of the Law no human being will be justified in God's sight.