

## ROMANS 3:19, 20

### CERTAINTIES: JUSTIFIED? OR JUDGED?

“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. For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.”<sup>1</sup>

“So that every mouth may be stopped.” That is an arresting phrase, wouldn’t you agree? How does one answer when called to give an account before the Lord God? What can one say when standing before Him who holds all life in His hand? Let’s be clear about a universal event—each person must give an account to the True and Living God. Scripture cautions,

“As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me,  
and every tongue shall confess to God.’

“So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God” [ROMANS 14:11, 12]. An account? For what are we to account?

It is a certainty that every individual will give an account to God for the investment of his or her life. What you accomplished, how you used the hours and the days you were allotted, who you influenced for good or for evil—you will give an account before the Living God for what you have done with your life. Every deed you have performed and every word spoken are known to the Lord God; and He will reveal what you are when you give an account of your life.

God’s Word reminds us that “God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil” [ECCLESIASTES 12:14]. The universal scope of that statement should give every person pause. My actions, the choices I make and the way in which I conduct my life, shall all be revealed when I stand before the True and Living God. Such knowledge should serve to restrain me from acting rashly or focusing only on my desires.

I am compelled to be cautious in my speech whenever I hear again the Words of the Master. “I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned” [MATTHEW 12:36, 37]. Imagine! Every word, including every careless word I have spoken, shall be recalled before the throne of the Judge of all the universe. My casual swearing, my harsh criticism of others, my thoughtless accusations, shall all be remembered before the Lord Christ.

What is more startling yet is that this knowledge is innate to each morally conscious individual. One may convince himself that he is okay because he hasn’t violated any of a set of moral laws which he esteems or because he is diligent in performing a set of prescribed religious rituals, or an individual may imagine that because she isn’t as bad as someone else she knows, that everything will be fine. Tragically, we often craft a god of our own making, deluding ourselves into thinking that we are okay because of the standard we have crafted. However, when we are left alone with our thoughts, we know that we must give an answer for how we have lived and what we have done with God’s mercies.

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**CONDEMNED!** Immediately before our text, the Apostle has demolished any effort readers may have exerted to justify themselves. Perhaps someone imagines that he or she isn't all that evil. They are aware of numerous other people who are more blatant than they are in their sinful proclivities. They console themselves that don't commit any sins that are especially condemned in society—they don't defile temples; they haven't robbed any merchants; they never murdered anyone; perhaps they are even chaste in their language and conduct. Surely, they reason, their life is sufficiently "good" to compel God to accept them. They are certain that it will not be difficult to give an account of their life and conduct when called to stand before the Living God.

Paul makes an arresting statement at the conclusion of the second chapter of Romans. The Apostle wrote, "No one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God" [ROMANS 2:28, 29]. This assertion leads to the logical question, "Then, what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision" [ROMANS 3:1]? He answers that "the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God" [ROMANS 3:2].

It is as though Paul anticipates the argument that the Jews are God's Chosen People. They have been entrusted with the oracles of God. So, what, if some were unfaithful? Isn't it enough that they have this religious heritage? Surely God will accept one who is a conscientious Jew, one who has kept the Law, carefully observing all the minute tenets of that Law!

The Apostle demolishes such thinking through citing a variety of Scripture portions.

“None is righteous, no, not one;  
no one understands;  
no one seeks for God.  
All have turned aside; together they have become worthless;  
no one does good,  
not even one.’  
‘Their throat is an open grave;  
they use their tongues to deceive.’  
‘The venom of asps is under their lips.’  
‘Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.’  
‘Their feet are swift to shed blood;  
in their paths are ruin and misery,  
and the way of peace they have not known.’  
‘There is no fear of God before their eyes.’”

[ROMANS 3:10b-18]

The disquieting summation of this dismal assessment of mankind is provided in ROMANS 3:23:  
“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

Paul just stripped away whatever pride careful observers of the Law may have possessed. There are not many Jews who will listen to my message, though there are professed Christians who depend heavily on what they do or don't do rather than they depend upon whether God knows them. In the First Corinthian Letter, the Apostle has testified, "If anyone loves God, he is known by God" [1 CORINTHIANS 8:3]. How does one show love for God? By keeping His commandments! Jesus said, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" [JOHN 14:15].

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This truth was iterated and emphasised soon after Jesus had spoken these words, when the Master said, “Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.’ Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, ‘Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?’ Jesus answered him, ‘If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father’s who sent me’” [JOHN 14:21-24].

To love God is to seek His honour; and honouring God is through obedience to His commands. That is the thrust of the message delivered by John, the Apostle of Love, who wrote, “This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome” [1 JOHN 5:3].

I am conscious of how carefully the Apostle employs language when he writes to those who claimed to be followers of the Living God. You will perhaps remember that Paul wrote, “Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods. But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more? You observe days and months and seasons and years! I am afraid I may have labored over you in vain” [GALATIANS 4:8-11]. Take note that the issue is less a matter of whether one knows God than it is that one is “known by God.” To be known by God implies that we cannot casually turn from obeying Him.

In his final missive that would be included in the New Testament, the Apostle Paul testified, “God’s firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: ‘The Lord knows those who are his’” [2 TIMOTHY 2:19].

The point of this admittedly extended exercise consisting of refreshing our memories of what it means to love God is to emphasise that the disobedient are condemned. Condemned! That is such a dark concept; and most people appear to reject the idea because they can’t tolerate the thought that God has rejected them. However, condemnation is presented early in the Gospel message; if there is no possibility of condemnation, the idea of a loving God becomes a fantasy. Remember the warning given 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.” This dark warning is iterated in the final statement given in this chapter. “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” [JOHN 3:36].

Let me state a vital principle that we must never forget—without divine wrath, divine love is a meaningless concept. The dark side of God’s love is God’s wrath. We must not dismiss the wrath of God as something of no great concern. Paul warns followers of the Christ, “The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth” [ROMANS 1:18].

In the Ephesian Encyclical, Paul warns followers of the Son of God, “Sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience” [EPHESIANS 5:3-6].

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The warning issued in the passage just read anticipates what is written elsewhere in the Colossian Letter. In that missive, the Apostle urges Christians, “Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming” [COLOSSIANS 3:5, 6]. It is doubtful that any living person can understand how dreadful it would be to experience “the wrath of God.” To face divine rage, against which there is no defence, would be terrifying in the extreme!

The Spirit of God living in and working in the life of the child of God restrains that child from pursuing his or her own fallen desires. Though the twice-born child of God may indulge his flesh for a brief time, he cannot live in conspicuous rebellion without divine intervention. God will not permit His child to disgrace Him without putting a stop to His child’s dishonourable, self-destructive actions. This is evident from even a cursory consideration of the Word of God. Recall that the Apostle of Love has instructed followers of the Risen Son of God, “If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask, and God will give him life—to those who commit sins that do not lead to death. There is sin that leads to death; I do not say that one should pray for that. All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin that does not lead to death.

“We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him” [1 JOHN 5:16-18]. “There is a sin that leads to death!” This is God’s warning that divine discipline which is not heeded must result in calling His obstinate child home. Moreover, “We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning.” There is no lasting joy in choosing sin; the pleasure sought quickly grows bitter, detestable, ultimately proving to be transient.

John’s words echo the words of James, who wrote, “My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins” [JAMES 5:19, 20].

A colleague of mine was wont to say, “A sheep may fall into the mud; but a sheep will never lie down in the mud.” He was correct; the individual who walks in his or her own wilful way, ignoring choices that glorify the Living God and who yet is not disciplined by God, has no claim on God. In fact, the absence of discipline demonstrates an absence of relationship. This is clearly stated in the Letter to Hebrew Christians where we read, “If you do not experience discipline, something all sons have shared in, then you are illegitimate and are not sons” [HEBREWS 12:8].

The import of this excursion through New Testament theology is to remind us that there is a distinction between twice-born citizens of the Kingdom of God and those who are identified as “earth dwellers.” Those who are born from above are not condemned. Those who are of the earth are under condemnation. John has drawn attention to this distinction when he writes, “We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one” [1 JOHN 5:19].

**THE PURPOSE OF THE LAW** — Those who attempt to hold to the Law as necessary for salvation, whether as the central feature of salvation or as an adjunct to salvation, are in error. At best, those holding such a view are woefully deluded. There are denominations who present themselves as “Christian” who insist on maintain the Law. They do not keep the Law, but they imagine that because they worship on a particular day of the week, or because they maintain a partial Kosher diet, or because they observe some of the Law that they are keeping the entire Law. At best, they are ignorant of what is written in the Word; at worst, they are deceived.

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Anyone who would put the Law in the proper place will do well to recall James' words. "Whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it. For he who said, 'Do not commit adultery,' also said, 'Do not murder.' If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law" [JAMES 2:10, 11].

Underscore the thought in your mind: If you intend to live by the Law, not a single requirement may be ignored—you must keep the Law perfectly. The same law that demands that you avoid eating pork demands that you do no work on the Sabbath. "No work" means that you cannot go for a walk, drive to a meeting, cook—you are to avoid doing the normal tasks that define your day. Those who wish to live by the law need to answer the question with which Peter challenged Pharisees at the Jerusalem conference, "Why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear" [ACTS 15:10]?

Sects and cults that claim to keep the Law fail miserably in their effort. If Peter and the entire Jewish nation were incapable of keeping the Law, what makes modern devotees to the Law imagine they can keep those austere canons? Such individuals appear much like the lawyers whom Jesus excoriated: "Woe to you lawyers also! For you load people with burdens hard to bear, and you yourselves do not touch the burdens with one of your fingers. Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets whom your fathers killed. So, you are witnesses and you consent to the deeds of your fathers, for they killed them, and you build their tombs. Therefore, also the Wisdom of God said, 'I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and persecute,' so that the blood of all the prophets, shed from the foundation of the world, may be charged against this generation, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who perished between the altar and the sanctuary. Yes, I tell you, it will be required of this generation. Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge. You did not enter yourselves, and you hindered those who were entering" [LUKE 11:46-52].

Remember, Jesus' attack on the lawyers followed on the heel of His censure of the Pharisees. "Now you Pharisees cleanse the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. You fools! Did not he who made the outside make the inside also? But give as alms those things that are within, and behold, everything is clean for you.

"But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and every herb, and neglect justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the best seat in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces. Woe to you! For you are like unmarked graves, and people walk over them without knowing it" [LUKE 11:39-44].

Couple these stern words with the warning issued during the Sermon on the Mount and you are driven to the conclusion that attempting to live by the Law is not only an impossibility, but making such an attempt is certain to bring down divine condemnation. Remember that Jesus said, "Whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven" [MATTHEW 5:19a].

Worshipping on Saturday while failing to observe the remainder of the Law brings divine condemnation. Avoiding pork while working on the Sabbath must inevitably result in divine censure. Surely, Paul's admonition to the Christians of Galatia applies in this instance. Paul wrote, "All who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, 'Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.' Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for 'The righteous shall live by faith.' But the law is not of faith, rather 'The one who does them shall live by them'" [GALATIANS 3:10-12].

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The Apostle will continue this review of the Law until logic compels readers to arrive at the only conclusion possible—the Law cannot bring righteousness. In fact, attempting to rely on the Law as a means of pleasing God can only bring loss and divine censure. “Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law. But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

“Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith” [GALATIANS 3:21-26].

If the Galatian Letter were the only place that the Word of God spoke of the Law passing off the scene, it would be enough for conscientious Christians. However, the Apostle has written in the Letter to Roman Saints that “Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes” [ROMANS 10:4]. Surely, that is sufficiently clear for anyone to understand!

The writer of the Hebrew Letter was guided by the Spirit of God to reach back to the writings of Jeremiah the Prophet. Quoting Jeremiah’s words, the ancient writer wrote,

“Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord,  
when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel  
and with the house of Judah,  
not like the covenant that I made with their fathers  
on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them  
out of the land of Egypt.  
For they did not continue in my covenant,  
and so I showed no concern for them, declares the Lord.  
For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel  
after those days, declares the Lord:  
I will put my laws into their minds,  
and write them on their hearts,  
and I will be their God,  
and they shall be my people.  
And they shall not teach, each one his neighbor  
and each one his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’  
for they shall all know me,  
from the least of them to the greatest.  
For I will be merciful toward their iniquities,  
and I will remember their sins no more.”

[HEBREWS 8:8-12]

Thus, Jeremiah, writing under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, foresaw the passing of the Law. He saw God moving to bring in a new dispensation. Then, the writer of this Letter to Hebrew Christians makes a most startling affirmation for those first readers, filtering what was written through a Jewish lens. The writer wrote, “In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away” [HEBREWS 8:13]. The Old Covenant—the Law of Moses, was obsolete; it was ready to vanish away. By now, it is gone, no longer with power over anyone seeking God and God’s approval.

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The writer looked what can only be understood to be an essential element of the Mosaic Law—the requirement of the sacrificial system. The Tabernacle and the Most Holy Place are described in some detail; and after providing this description, the writer included this insight, “These preparations having thus been made, the priests go regularly into the first section, performing their ritual duties, but into the second only the high priest goes, and he but once a year, and not without taking blood, which he offers for himself and for the unintentional sins of the people. By this the Holy Spirit indicates that the way into the holy places is not yet opened as long as the first section is still standing (which is symbolic for the present age). According to this arrangement, gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper, but deal only with food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until the time of reformation” [**HEBREWS 9:6-10**].

Providing sacrifices was at the heart of the Law. There were sacrifices for when someone had sinned unknowingly, sacrifices for various other degrees of sinful behaviour and sacrifices designed to express gratitude to God for His goodness and for His mercy. All these sacrifices required the one offering them to go through a priest appointed by God to oversee these rituals. Priests were essential to the Law, and only those divinely designated to serve as priests could serve in that office. Priests oversaw even major health issues, pronouncing an individual clean or unclean even while serving as intermediaries between man and God. However, that entire system was eliminated with the sacrifice of the Lamb of God and His resurrection. Thus, the writer pointed out that the various aspects of the Law, especially gifts and sacrifices, could never perfect the conscience of the worshiper. All those various rituals could accomplish would be to show commitment to what was written in the Law—food and drink, as well as the various washings and regulations for the body that were imposed until the old Law passed away and the new dispensation was in place. This is the import of the words that follow.

“But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God” [**HEBREWS 9:11-14**].

Look at another instance when the Word of God speaks of the passing of that old covenant. Writing to the Church in Colossae, Paul urged these saints to free themselves from the regimen imposed by the Law. In **COLOSSIANS 2:16-23** he writes, “Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.

“If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations—‘Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch’ (referring to things that all perish as they are used)—according to human precepts and teachings? These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.”

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The Law condemned all people; it exposed our inability to secure our own salvation, exposing our fallen condition. The Law had no effect on those outside of the Law, though ideally adherents of the Law would attract outsiders to look to the LORD God for mercy as they committed themselves to honour Him. The tragedy of those who received the Law was that they never did draw pagans to look to the Living God. Under the old covenant, and down to this day, those who attempt to live by the Law are more likely to repulse those seeking God's grace than they are to attract them to seek Him.

This holds true for almost any religion that is based on man's efforts to secure God's blessing or to hold those blessings. For instance, Jehovah's Witnesses have a wide open backdoor with more adherents leaving the religion than entering into the religion despite the diligent efforts of the adherents to gain new adherents. Islam boasts that it is growing rapidly. What is less well-known is that Muslims reading the Bible or listening to radio broadcasts are growing at an astonishing clip throughout the Muslim world. Some years back, various eastern religions appeared to be making incredible inroads into the North American religious scene. One could not read an analysis of religion without reading of the growth of Hare Krishna, of Transcendental Meditation or some other novel religion based on eastern religious practises. Today, heightened interest such as witnessed thirty or forty years ago is absent; those who were once so enthusiastic have deserted the religions they once claimed brought them such peace. These various religions are named as examples of man's efforts to coerce God. They satisfy those practising such religions for a time, but they ultimately and inevitably fail to satisfy.

**THE ATTRACTION OF THE LAW** — What, then, is the attraction of the Law? Why would anyone willingly place themselves under that condemnation? What was there in Judaism that elicited admiration in that Roman Empire? Though Judaism was a minor religion in terms of numbers, Jews were admired by many citizens. Ignoring the fact that God watches over His people, even though adherents often prove presumptuous, what is there that would lead anyone to imagine that an individual can do something to coerce God to accept him?

To answer this question, we must consider the condition of religion in the ancient world. This, in turn, leads to consideration of the religious situation in the contemporary world, raising in turn the question of why people would consider any of a number of religions that place ritual demands on the adherents. To simplify our brief consideration, establish in your mind that there are only two religions in the world. One religion adopts the position that there is nothing one can do to influence God—God must provide the means for people to approach Him. The other religion, however many façades are presented, assumes that people can do something to influence God's consideration of the individual. The first concept depends on divine mercy; the latter concept assumes that man must provide in some way for his own salvation.

Whenever studying a religion for the first time, ask what is the relationship of man to God. Can a mere mortal do something to compel God to accept the individual? Or does a man or woman come before the Living God, seeking mercy? Tragically, it is a subtle shift to move from serving God to attempting to coerce God. Underscore in your mind that God is sovereign; there is nothing that He needs from man. Perhaps you will recall the manner in which the Psalmist addresses this issue.

“The earth is the LORD's and the fullness thereof,  
the world and those who dwell therein”

[PSALM 24:1]



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That doesn't sound as if God needs anything I would be able to supply! Another Psalm declares:

“Hear, O my people, and I will speak;  
O Israel, I will testify against you.  
I am God, your God.  
Not for your sacrifices do I rebuke you;  
your burnt offerings are continually before me.  
I will not accept a bull from your house  
or goats from your folds.  
For every beast of the forest is mine,  
the cattle on a thousand hills.  
I know all the birds of the hills,  
and all that moves in the field is mine.  
  
“If I were hungry, I would not tell you,  
for the world and its fullness are mine.”

[PSALM 50:7-12]

Coming to God I can have no expectation of inducing Him to accept me. Yet, the natural man imagines that he can do something to compel God to accept him. The man of this world imagines that he can somehow make himself acceptable to God. Of course, that is sheer folly. The song writer was correct when he wrote:

Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to Thy cross I cling;  
Naked, come to Thee for dress, helpless, look to Thee for grace;  
Foul, I to the fountain fly; wash me, Saviour, or I die!<sup>2</sup>

I can do nothing to make myself acceptable to God; I can do nothing to induce God to accept me. If I will be accepted by God, I must be accepted in the Beloved Son [see **EPHESIANS 1:8**].

Even in seeking to keep the Law God has given—whether the written Law given to the Jew or the natural Law inherent in each heart, our tendency is to imagine that we can satisfy God through keeping the Law—if not perfectly, then sufficient to assuage the wrath of God. Some theological teachers contend that if one could keep the Law perfectly, they could bring about their own salvation. However, Paul dashes this thought when he writes, “By works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin” [**ROMANS 3:20**].

What the Apostle has written here is but an iteration of what he wrote earlier in the Letter to the Christians of Galatia. “We know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified” [**GALATIANS 2:16**]. There is no possibility that any individual would have either the ability or even the inclination to keep the Law of God. Therefore, the only appropriate response to the knowledge of our broken condition is silence. The whole world is held accountable to God; let all the earth remain silent.

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<sup>2</sup> Augustus Montague Toplady, “Rock of Ages”

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There are no exceptions, every unredeemed individual, whether Jew or Gentile, is under the Law of God and is accountable to God. The Jew is under God's written Law and the Gentile is under the equally God-given Law written in his heart. God is the Creator; He holds the entire universe together. It is impossible for anyone or for anything to be outside of His control.

Early in the ministry of Donald Grey Barnhouse, he knew a man who lived near the Tenth Presbyterian Church, the church which Barnhouse pastored. Barnhouse would often speak to this man about the gospel; but the man usually replied to the preacher's message by laughing in patronising fashion. He wasn't the kind of person who needed the church or any kind of religion, he would say. He belonged to a lodge, the chief function of which was to do good works. He was active in that lodge and lived up to its high moral principles. If he ever met God, he felt he would be all right on the basis of his lodge associations.

Years went by, during which the man resisted all attempts by Barnhouse to explain the gospel to him.

One day, word came that the man was quite ill. He had been stricken with a fatal disease and was not expected to live out the day. Barnhouse went to see him. A member of his lodge was present on what is called "the deathwatch," since no member of the lodge was supposed to be allowed to die alone. This lodge member was seated across the room from the bed on which the other was dying. He was reading a newspaper. As Barnhouse entered, the replacement for this man also entered the room, and the shift was changed. The first man got up and left; the second took his place.

Barnhouse realized that the situation was desperate and decided on a bold course of action. He sat down by the bed and spoke along these lines: "You don't mind my staying here for a few minutes and watching you, do you? I have often wondered what it would be like for a person to die without Jesus Christ. I have known you for quite a few years, and you have always said that you do not need Christ and that your lodge obligations are enough. I would like to observe a person end his life with those beliefs and see what it is like."

The man on the bed was struck as through a sword pierced his heart. He looked at Barnhouse like a wounded animal. "You ... wouldn't ... mock ... a dying man ... would you?" he said.

Barnhouse then asked his diagnostic question. "You are going to appear before God in a very short while. Suppose he asks you, 'What right do you have to come into my heaven?' What will you say?"

This time the man looked back in agonized silence, and great tears flowed from his frightened eyes and down his pale, wrinkled cheeks. Then, while he listened attentively, Barnhouse told him how he might approach God through the merits of the Lord Jesus Christ. The man replied that his mother had taught him those truths as a child but that he had abandoned them. He had lived without faith. But now, in his final moments on earth, he came back to God through Jesus Christ, confessed his faith in Christ and then had someone call his family members so he might give his newfound testimony to them. He asked Barnhouse to tell his story at his funeral, which took place a few days later.<sup>3</sup>

This is the answer that I need. I need Christ as Master over my life. My puny efforts to fulfil righteousness are as filthy rags. I rest in Christ the Lord who has fulfilled all righteousness. "Now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ" [EPHESIANS 2:13].

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<sup>3</sup> Related by James Montgomery Boice, **Romans: Justification by Faith, vol. 1** (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1991-) 323

**ROMANS 3:19, 20**  
**JUSTIFIED? OR JUDGED?**

The Apostle continues by testifying, “[Christ Jesus] himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So, then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone” [EPHESIANS 2:14-20]. This is the Faith offered to all. Amen.