

Text: Romans 2:12-16 *For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law (for not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified; for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things contained in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them) in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel.*

Theme: "No Excuses"

- for those with the Law
- for those without the Law

Dear fellow redeemed in Christ Jesus, beloved of God, called to be saints,

I do not think that there is a person present here today who doesn't know what an excuse is. An excuse is something you say when you're in trouble and hope to get out of it. For instance when your late for school or work, you think you need an excuse because you know "not wanting to get out of bed this morning" will not be an accepted excuse by your teacher or boss. Or maybe you think that ignorance is bliss. "I didn't know the speed limit was 25 and not 55 officer!" "I didn't know that it would hurt my brother to hit him - with a rock!" We think that ignorance in and of itself ought to be a valid excuse when we do something wrong. We make excuses when we did something wrong or thoughtless and we are hoping that our mistakes won't be held against us.

This matter of making excuses for wrongdoing is nothing new. Our first parents did it after they fell into sin. When God asked Adam about what he had done, Adam's excuse was that the wife God gave him made him sin. When God asked Eve about what had happened, Eve's excuse was that the serpent deceived her into sinning. And so sinful man has been trying to excuse his sin ever since. But is there any excuse for sin that will stand up before God who sees into the heart?

Last Sunday we heard the theme of Paul's letter to the Romans as he wrote of the righteousness of God is revealed in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In the first three chapters of Romans, Paul methodically lays out that all men - both Jew and Gentile alike - have sinned and need that righteousness that only God gives through faith in Jesus. In the last verse of today's text Paul writes of "*the day when God will judge the secrets fo men by Jesus Christ.*" Paul is speaking of Judgment Day when Jesus Christ will return on the throne of His glory to judge both the living and the dead. Let us therefore consider this morning how on that day that no man - whether it is the Jew who had the Law or the Gentile who was without the Law - will have an excuse for sin on Judgment Day. May God through His word lead us to repent of our sin and believe on Jesus for salvation. Amen.

THOSE WITH THE LAW

In today's text and throughout the letter to the Romans, Paul frequently refers to the law. When Paul writes of those with the "law" and those without "law" in our text he is especially referring to the Law which God gave through Moses. In particular we might think of the 10 Commandments, but the "law" can also refer to the first five books of the Old Testament. Jesus

Himself spoke in this way when He referred to the Old Testament as “the Law and the Prophets.”

So when Paul in our text refers to have the law, he is referring especially to the Jews. It was to the Jewish Children of Israel that God revealed His will. It was through Moses that God wrote His 10 Commandments on tablets of stone for the Children of Israel. Along with the 10 Commandments, the entire will and law of God was to be passed down from one generation to the next. By the time of Jesus and the Apostles this is something the Jews prided themselves on. God had given His law to THEM and not another nation. They heard it every Sabbath day. They thought they were better off in the sight of God because they had the law and heard it regularly.

But the question is this: on Judgment Day will the LORD give extra credit points to those who simply possess His law? Will He judge easier those who have heard His 10 Commandments? Does Jesus simply say, **“Blessed are they that hear the word of God?”** or is there more to it? Is someone blessed who simply has the sound of the word go into his ear? We know how the rest of that passage goes - Jesus said, **“Blessed are they that hear the Word of God – and keep it!”** (Lk 11:28)

In our Gospel lesson about the Good Samaritan, who had heard the law of God and probably knew it by memory. Both the priest and the Levite had known the 10 Commandments from childhood on. Both were no doubt very faithful in going to the synagogue every Sabbath and hearing the Law being read. But as they came upon that beaten man and had the opportunity to put the law into practice by loving their neighbor as themselves, what did they do? They both ignored the man in need and kept on walking. Jesus said that the Levite even went so far as to pass by on the other side of the road as to avoid any and all contact with the beaten man.

It is indeed a blessing to have the Law of God and to know what His will is. But the simple possession of the law is not what God is interested in. Standing before God on Judgment Day and saying, “But I heard your law every Sabbath!” is not a valid excuse for ignoring what God says to do and not do in His law. Paul writes in our text, **“As many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law, for not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified.”** Those who have the law will be judged by the law on the last day. Those who heard and yet did not love their neighbor as themselves will be judged accordingly by that law. Those who heard and did not love the LORD God with all their heart and with all their soul and with all their strength, will be judged by the law that ordered them to do so. Those who have the law and sinned in the law will be without excuse in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ.

THOSE WITHOUT THE LAW

One of the things I was struck by listening to Pastor Jeremiah on Friday, was hearing about his work among the Masai people. These people believe that their god - “Engai” - lives in the great volcanic mountain and also in the great trees of the region. Their worship of the Engai involves pouring the precious milk of a healthy cow on the ground under a tree. Yearly they go to their sacred mountain and sacrifice a healthy calf. Why do they do this? Why do they feel a need to worship a deity and make sacrifices to it?

Like every person ever born in this world, the Masai people were born with a natural knowledge of God. They know there is a god out there, but who the real God is they do not know so they worship a mountain and trees. The reason the Masai people make sacrifices is because they have a basic knowledge of sin. They have a conscience and they know right and wrong and thus they try to earn the favor of their god Engai by making sacrifices.

Paul writes of this very thing in today's text. ***When Gentiles*** (that is the unbelieving heathen), ***who do not have the law, by nature do the things contained in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them.*** The Masai have probably never heard of the 10 Commandments, yet they seek to honor a god. They have probably never heard of Moses yet they know to honor their father and mother, and not murder or steal. This is because the law is written in their hearts.

All people are born with a conscience - a basic knowledge of right and wrong. In Catechism class we talk of the conscience as that little voice inside of you that says what you are doing is either good or bad. Maybe you've seen cartoons or TV shows where a person has a little angel on one shoulder talking into his ear telling him to do the right thing and a little devil on the other shoulder talking into to his ear telling him to do something wrong. That is one way to visualize the conscience which God has implanted in every person.

Even though there may be those who have not the law, they have the basics of the law written in their heart. Why is it that all people know what it means to feel guilty? Because of their conscience. It is almost as if there is a mini-courtroom in the heart of every person and for every action they do, there is a trial. The conscience either accuses of wrong doing or excuses what was done as being right. Now the conscience is not a perfect knowledge of the law, because over time consciences become dull and defiled. Yet even without Moses or the 10 Commandments all men know basic right from wrong - they are, as Paul says, ***"a law unto themselves."***

While the pagans and heathen may not have the law, like the Children of Israel did - saying they did not know on Judgment Day will not be an excuse. ***For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law.*** In the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, those without the law will not be able to use ignorance as an excuse.

Where then does that leave us - you and me? While we are not Jews by nature, we too are not without law. Our parents, grandparents, Sunday School teachers, and pastors taught us the law. We have heard God's will for us as summarized in the 10 Commandments. Next Sunday a confirmand will remind us of what the Law of God is. So we have heard it, but have we been doers of the law or hearers only? If we honest compare our lives with the law of God or if we even compare our lives with our conscience, we will find sin upon sin. We too are without excuse. When God judges the secrets of our hearts there is nothing we can say against the accusation of sin. There is no excuse that God would accept. We simply plead for mercy and pray with the psalmist - ***Cleanse me from secret faults.*** (Ps 19:12)

But return to those closing words of our text. Who is it that God will judge by? Who is it that will come to judge the living and the dead? Paul writes, ***God will judge the secrets of men BY JESUS CHRIST!*** And who is this Jesus Christ to you? Is He your Savior from sin? What do those nail prints in His hands and feet mean to you? The nail prints in His hands and His feet show us that while I am a wretched sinner Jesus died for me! That means the one who loved me enough to die for me, is the same one who will judge me on the last day! The one by whom God will judge the secrets of men is the same one by whom we are saved. One of our local pastors was once asked what he was going to say when stood before the judgement seat of God. The pastor's response surprised this man. "I'll point to Jesus and say, 'I'm with Him.'"

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3rd Sunday a. Trinity

Prince of Peace, Hecla

So is there any excuse for sin? Absolutely not. Adam's excuse that Eve made her eat the fruit was not valid. Nor was Eve's excuse that the serpent deceived her and she ate was not valid. With or without the law we stand condemned because of our sin. We confess this truth every Sunday. Our only hope is on that Man that was nailed to a cross and died. Our hope is certain because He did not remain dead but rose again. It is He who died to save us and it is He who will come again to judge the secrets of men. May God help us to cling to Him and His salvation until that last great day. Amen.