

## **A. Romans 2:5-11. God's criteria according to which he will judge on the final judgement day**

## **B. Romans 2:12-15. God's criteria for judging Gentiles, Jews and Christians**

## **C. Romans 2:16. How god will judge people on the final judgement day**

### **A. ROMANS 2:5-11. GOD'S CRITERIA ACCORDING TO WHICH HE WILL JUDGE ON THE FINAL JUDGEMENT DAY**

It is not correct to say that these verses deal exclusively with *the law* and not with *the gospel*, because Paul's teaching concerning the final judgement day is a part of the gospel (Romans 2:16)!

Romans 3:20-24 and Romans 2:6-10 speak about different issues:

Romans 3:20-24 speaks about the law with respect to salvation (justification). The 'law' is God's righteous requirement for salvation (justification). God is perfectly holy and righteous. On the one hand, his holiness and righteousness demand that all people in the world must be completely holy and righteous as God himself is. On the other hand, his holiness and righteousness demand that all their sins must be punished! The issue of salvation is determined in a person's life before death. In the issue of salvation the law can only condemn every person as guilty and lost. In the issue of salvation doing the works of the law only brings a curse on one (Galatians 3:10).

Romans 2:6-10 speaks about the law with respect to judgement (condemnation). The 'law' is God's righteous measure or standard for the final judgement (condemnation). The issue of the final judgement is determined at the end of history. In the issue of the final judgement the law functions as the measure or standard by which unbelievers and wicked people will be punished and believers will be rewarded. Then all people will be judged according to their good and evil works (Ecclesiastes 12:14; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Ephesians 6:8).

The righteous people have eternal life. They have already been justified, because they believed in Christ and received his salvation. They persevere in doing good. And they will receive the perfect fulfilment of eternal life, not on the basis of their good works, but only by grace. The unrighteous people will only be condemned. The wicked people will be condemned, because they did not believe in Jesus Christ and because they did evil things. And they will be punished justly according to what their evil works deserve and on the basis of their imperfect works and in accordance with their unholy and unrighteous works.

### **1. God's final judgement is an absolute necessity – justice must and will be done (Romans 2:5).**

#### **▪ The final judgement is absolute necessary.**

Life is manifestly unjust! The good people suffer, the unselfish people are exploited, the meek people are terrorised, and the poor people are deprived. On the other hand, the evil people flourish, the selfish people make fortunes, the brutal people oppress the meek and the rich people cause the poor to get poorer. Tyrants die peacefully in their beds while saints are tortured to death. If, as we are assuming, there is a God who is all-powerful and good, how can he possibly allow the injustices in the world to continue? If he does nothing about all the injustice in the world, either now or after this life in order to redress such gross injustice and put down such rampant evil, then he is either not all-powerful and so cannot do it, or he is not good and so does not care!

However, the Bible teaches very clearly that the Living God is all-powerful and good and that justice on a cosmic scale will be done. All the people who ever lived on earth will be present at this final future judgement!

The final judgement day is an absolute necessity, because there are people (Jews and Gentiles) who do not repent or do not want to repent. Instead they stubbornly persist in their unbelief, disobedience, godlessness and wickedness.

#### **▪ The Jews stubbornly refused to repent.**

During the time of Paul, God was still patient with the Jews, because he did not immediately execute his wrath against them, but postponed it till the final judgement day. Compare this with God's patience with Gentiles (2 Corinthians 6:1-2; 2 Peter 3:9).

- **However the Jews are piling up wrath against them on the final judgement day.**

By refusing to repent, the Jews are all the time piling up a treasure for themselves for the final judgement day. This treasure consists of God's wrath. Compare this with God's wrath against the Gentiles (Romans 1:18). 'God's wrath' is the just reaction and fair expression of God's justice and truth against the sins of the Jews.

On the final judgement day, God will execute his stored up wrath against the unrepentant Jews (and unrepentant people of any nation and any religion)!

## **2. God's final judgement will be universal – for each Jew and each Gentile (Romans 2:6a).**

God will judge each person, whether Jew or Gentile.

## **3. God's final judgement will be just (fair) – according to works (Romans 2:6b-10).**

- **God is absolutely righteous and fair.**

The final judgement is described in the same way in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. "Far be it from God to do evil, from the Almighty to do wrong. He repays a man for what he has done; he brings upon him what his conduct deserves. It is unthinkable that God would do wrong, that the Almighty would pervert justice" (Job 34:10-12). He "will reward each person according to what he has done" (Psalm 62:12). "For God will bring every deed into judgement, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil" (Ecclesiastes 12:14). "We must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him, for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad" (2 Corinthians 5:10). Thus Romans 2:6 says, "God will give to each person according to what he has done."

- **The final judgement will be according to works.**

The consistent message in the Bible is that God's final judgement will be according to deeds (works, actual conduct). It is important for people from all religions in the world to understand that no one will be saved according to their works, but that everyone will be judged according to their works! Romans 2:6 does not imply that any person could or would be justified by his works! The consistent message in the Bible is that *salvation* is on the basis of what God accomplished in Jesus Christ and that *judgement* will be on the basis of what man accomplished!

- **The meaning of 'doing good' in Romans 2:7.**

Romans 2:7 needs explanation. It says, "To those, who by persistence in good work seek glory, honour and immortality, (God will give) eternal life." If this verse is taken out of its context it may seem that people (whether Christian or no Christian) will be justified (saved) by their good works!

However, because the letter to the Romans clearly teaches that no one will be saved (justified) by his works, Romans 2:7 cannot be contradictory and thus must mean something else.

The immediate context teaches clearly what is meant by "the people who really do good". The context clarifies what Paul is teaching. Romans 2:8-9 teaches that people will be judged or condemned by their evil works. But Romans 2:7 does not teach that there will be some people who could or would be saved or justified by their good works!

- **The people who really do good have not been saved or justified by their good works.**

Romans 3:20-24 says: "No one will be declared righteous in God's sight by works (the works of the law)." Not a single person keeps or can keep the law in such a way that he could be justified (saved) (Romans 8:7-8). The gospel is the good news that God made an eternal plan to justify (save) people without the works of the law. While the law condemns all people of falling short of God's required perfection, the gospel proclaims how Jesus Christ justifies (saves) condemned people. The law shows people that they need a Saviour and the gospel proclaims the Saviour. Righteousness never comes by the works or accomplishments of man, but only by the work of Christ to make atonement for sins and to redeem lost people. This righteousness of Christ is received by faith.

- **The people who really do good do what is 'good' according to the Bible.**

Jesus already divided humanity into two groups: the hearers only and the doers (Matthew 7:24-29); those who try to preserve their life and those who lose their life (Matthew 10:39); those who bring forth evil and those who bring forth good from their hearts (Matthew 12:35); the evildoers and the righteous (Matthew 13:41-43); those who cause children to stumble and those who welcome children (Matthew 18:5-6); the proud and the humble (Matthew 23:12)(cf. Matthew 11:25-26; 21:28-32; 25:29,46).

Also James divided people into two groups: those who claim to have faith but have no deeds and those who prove their faith by their deeds (James 2:14-26). Likewise in Romans 2:7-10 the apostle Paul divided humanity into two groups: the righteous and the wicked. The righteous already have eternal life; persevere in doing what is good in the eyes of the God of the Bible; seek or aspire after the eternal things (glory, honour, immortality and peace); and receive the fullness of eternal life. The wicked are self-seeking, reject the truth as revealed in Christ and the Bible, follow evil; and remain under God's wrath.

It is thus the consistent message of the Bible that (merely secular) good works without these Christian aspirations are dead works and that (mere) Christian aspiration without (biblical) good works is presumption.

‘What is good’ in Romans 2:7 must be the opposite of ‘what is evil’ in Romans 2:8-9. ‘What is good’ must therefore be defined by seeking glory, honour, immortality *and the truth* (John 8:32-36; John 14:6; John 17:17)! And it must be defined by actually *doing the truth* and following what is good! And ‘what is bad’ must be defined by seeking oneself, rejecting the truth and following evil. This perseverance in doing what is good is what Jesus said in Matthew 24:13, “He who stands firm to the end will be saved” (Colossians 1:22-23; Hebrews 3:14). Romans 2:7 formulates this same truth by combining perseverance in doing good and perseverance in aspiring to the reality of salvation at the end of this age (the Christian hope in glory, honour, immortality). By combining ‘doing good’ and ‘salvation’ Paul emphasises that these two truths may never be separated. There is no ‘good’ apart from salvation, because good works without salvation in Jesus Christ are dead works. And there is also no salvation apart from ‘good’, because salvation in Jesus Christ without good works is presumption.

▪ **The real ‘good’ is perseverance in aspiring to the reality of salvation at the end of this age (Romans 2:7).**

The people who persevere in doing good are focussed on the future reality of Christians: the Christian hope with regard to glory, honour and immortality. They are the righteous people, who have been justified (saved) by grace through faith. They seek (desire to attain, strive after) the final manifestation of eternal life. The terms ‘glory’, ‘honour’, ‘immortality’ and ‘peace’ describe the nature, value, durability and blessings of eternal life (Romans 2:7,10).

• **‘Glory’ describes the nature of eternal life.**

The word ‘glory’ refers to participating in the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4) and to the future expectation of Christians, namely the final *transformation* of everything at the second coming of Christ (Romans 5:2; Romans 8:17). When believers in Jesus Christ die, they will see Jesus face to face (Philippians 1:23), their spirits will be transformed so that their whole personalities will be conformed to the likeness of Jesus Christ and they too will reflect the glory of God (Romans 8:17,18,21,29,30; Romans 9:23; 1 Corinthians 2:7; 2 Corinthians 4:17; Colossians 3:4; 1 John 3:1-3). And when Christ returns at his second coming, the mortal bodies of believers in Christ will be resurrected and transformed to become like the glorious body of Jesus Christ himself (1 Corinthians 15:43; Philippians 3:21). Then also the present earth will be shaken and cleansed with fire and transformed into a new earth (Romans 8:21).

• **‘Honour’ describes the value of eternal life.**

The word refers to God’s *approval* of believers in Jesus Christ in contrast to his disapproval and reproach of the ungodly and wicked people especially at the second coming (Matthew 25:21; Hebrews 2:7; 1 Peter 1:7; 2 Peter 1:17; Revelation 4:9,11; 5:12-13).

• **‘Immortality’ describes the durability of eternal life.**

The word ‘immortality’ refers to the imperishable nature after the resurrection from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:42). ‘Immortality’ refers to the *hope* of Christians in the resurrection of their bodies at the second coming (Romans 8:23; 1 Corinthians 15:42-54; 2 Corinthians 5:4; 1 Peter 1:4).

• **‘Peace’ (Romans 2:10) describes the blessings of eternal life.**

While verse 7 uses the word ‘immortality’, verse 10 uses the word ‘peace’. The word ‘peace’ refers to the *complete absence of trouble and distress* in the state of immortality, that is, on the new earth (Revelation 21:4). Here on the present earth ‘peace’ does not merely refer to peace between nations on earth, but peace in its highest sense, namely, *peace with God* (Isaiah 26:3-4; Romans 5:1), *peace with Christians* from every nation (Ephesians 2:14-15) and *peace of heart and mind* in the full enjoyment of God unto all eternity (Philippians 4:7; Revelation 21:4).

These aspirations to glory, honour, immortality and peace are the aspirations and expectations of born-again Christians, not of non-Christians or unbelievers. Only saved (justified) Christians can have such aspirations and expectations (hope)! Thus in Romans 2:7 ‘those who persevere in good works’ refer to ‘those who aspire to Christ likeness, approval of God, Christian hope and Christian peace. It is to these righteous people that God will give eternal life in its full and final phase!

Believers of other religions and unbelievers in general do not have these Christian aspirations or expectations: they do not believe in rebirth and transformation (John 3:3) or in the resurrection from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:19). They do not seek the approval of the God of the Bible and do not make peace with him. The requirement of God’s law is not met in them (Romans 8:4a; cf. John 10:11). And they do not live according to the Holy Spirit, but only according to their sinful natures (Romans 8:4b; cf. 1 Corinthians 12:3).

**Conclusion.** The people who persistently seek glory, honour, immortality and peace can only be believers in Jesus Christ! They do not obtain eternal life by doing any good works, but *their good works are an assurance to them* that God has given eternal life to them (Luke 3:8; John 15:5,8). Because they possess eternal life, their life is characterised by perseverance in doing good and by aspirations of hope.

▪ **The real ‘bad’ is the persistent refusal to believe in the gospel (Romans 2:8-10).**

In Romans 2:8-9 those who are self-seeking, reject the truth and follow evil refer to non-Christians and unbelievers. It is on these unrighteous people that God’s wrath and anger remain (Romans 1:18; John 3:36) and God will finally assign them to trouble and distress in the hell. They will perish (Romans 2:12; cf. John 3:18).

The people who seek themselves, who reject the truth as revealed in Christ and who follow evil are not focussed on the future reality of Christians. They are the unrighteous (wicked) people, who have not been justified (saved) by grace through faith. They seek themselves and their own opinions instead of seeking God and his revelation. They reject the gospel and in the view of the early Christians refusal to believe the gospel was the supreme disobedience!

Although the truth revealed in God’s special revelation in the Old Testament is much greater than his truth revealed in his general revelation in creation (Romans 1:18), the wicked among the Jews and the wicked among the Gentiles have this one thing in common and that is that they both *disbelieve the truth of the gospel!* ‘The truth’ is Jesus himself (John 14:6), the teachings of Jesus (John 8:31-32) and Gods’ Word (the Bible) in general (John 17:17).

It is very clear that the good works of Romans 2:7 are not any kind of works that are deemed ‘good’ in the eyes of secular people, but works that are ‘good’ in God’s eyes, because these good works are completely based on ‘the truth’, of God’s special revelation as it is revealed in Christ and the Bible. The truth is the gospel and whatever the Bible teaches about the Christian faith and practice. The ‘good works’ must include faith in Jesus Christ (John 6:28-29)!

The Bible teaches very clearly that it is impossible to do what is ‘good’ in God’s eyes apart from Jesus Christ! John 14:6 says that no one in the whole world or history will come to God the Father but by Jesus Christ! Acts 4:12 says that there is no other name than Jesus Christ given under heaven by which all people must be saved! And John 15:5 teaches that apart from Jesus Christ a person can do nothing, that is, nothing good and nothing that has any lasting value in God’s eyes!

God does not show favouritism in the final judgement, because not the law revealed during the Old Testament period and not the gospel revealed during the New Testament period will be the criterion in the final judgement, but the works of man, no matter whether they have received the special revelation of God or not! God will judge a person how he lived, no matter whether he had little or much knowledge of the law or the gospel! God will judge Jews with exactly the same criteria as the Gentiles. A real good work is thus believing and accepting the truth of the Bible instead of rejecting, suppressing or exchanging this truth by the so-called truths of non-Christians (the other religions)(Romans 1:18,25). A real good work is obeying this truth in the Bible instead of following wickedness.

**Conclusion.** The people who really do good can only be believers in Jesus Christ! Only Christians do what is ‘good’ in the eyes of the God of the Bible. The ‘good’ they do is NOT their so-called ‘good works’ (personal righteousness), but the fact that they have received Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord and with him the righteousness which he earned (cf. Matthew 10:18; John 6:28-29). ‘Eternal life’ is thus never earned or deserved by believers, but only given to believers in Jesus Christ! Believers of other religions or unbelievers in general will not be saved by simply doing good works, because their good works are not based on ‘the truth’ which the Bible teaches. Their good works are based on what their religions or they themselves regard as ‘good works’ and these always fall far short of God’s demand of perfection!

**4. God’s final judgement will show no favouritism (Romans 2:11).**

God will judge the Jews with exactly the same criteria as the Gentiles. The words, “first for the Jews, then for the Gentile” (Romans 2:10) may not be interpreted to mean that God will deal more generously with the Jews than with the Gentiles. God is the God of both the Jews and the Gentiles (Romans 3:29). God shows no favouritism (Romans 2:11; cf. Acts 10:28,34-35). And God will certainly judge the Jews with the same criteria that he will use for the Gentiles.

Since in the order of history the Jews had received the gospel before the Gentiles, this order will also be followed on the final judgement day. The Jews will be judged first (Romans 1:16; Romans 2:10). If they are believers in Christ, they will be the first to be publicly justified and rewarded. But if they are unbelievers, they will be the first to be publicly condemned to eternal punishment (Romans 2:9).

**5. God’s final judgement will be absolutely reasonable (Romans 2:12-16).**

God will judge people according to how much they know about God and God’s will. There are two groups of people in the world: “The people who are apart from the law” and “the people who are under (literally ‘in’, cf. Romans 3:19) the law”. But because “the requirements of God’s moral law” are written on the hearts of even the Gentiles and thus on everybody’s heart (Romans 2:14-15), the ‘law’ in this context must refer to *God’s special written revelation in the Old Testament*. The two groups must refer to the people who live outside God’s Old Testament revelation (generally the Gentiles) and the people who live within God’s Old Testament revelation (generally the Jews and later also the Christians).

Because everybody possesses the law in one or another sense, not a single person can hide behind the excuse that he did not know. Ignorance concerning God and God’s will is never complete (Romans 2:13-15)! On the final judgement day God will judge men’s secrets through Jesus Christ (Romans 2:16)(cf. John 5:22).

**Conclusion.** These five criteria for God's final judgement for both Jews and Gentiles prove that God does not favour the Jews more than any other nation on earth! The Jews have no special privileges!

## B. ROMANS 2:12-15. GOD'S CRITERIA FOR JUDGING GENTILES, JEWS AND CHRISTIANS

It is also not correct to state that the written Mosaic Law will be God's criterion for judgement on the final judgement day for both unbelievers as believers. Not the Law, but man's works in the light of God's revelation (including God's moral law) will be the criterion for judgement.

### 1. God's criterion for the judgement of the Gentiles (Romans 2:12a,14-15).

- **The Gentiles are *outside* God's special revelation in Old and New Testament.**

Romans 2:14 and 15 is an elaboration of God's criterion for judgement of the Gentiles on the final judgement day. These Gentiles do not have God's general revelation. They do not know any part of the Bible and have not yet heard the gospel.

"But how can the Gentiles, who do not have God's special revelation, be regarded as having sinned?" The assumption behind this question is that these Gentiles are *ignorant* of God's law and that God would be unjust if he judged them for something they did not know or had no choice.

The answer is that although these Gentiles do not have the written law (the Old and New Testament revelations) they nevertheless do "the things required by the law" that are written on their hearts. Therefore the Gentiles prove that they have knowledge of God's moral laws, because of two things:

- **Nevertheless, the Gentiles are never ignorant or innocent.**

Since creation the Gentiles, who do not have God's special revelation, pursue lawful vocations, marry and have children, show filial and natural affection, care for the poor and the sick, and do many other virtuous things which are *also* required by God's revealed law. They do these things 'by nature', which means, that this is their natural instinct or inclination in distinction from some law outside themselves, which forces them to do something. The fact that these Gentiles do by nature the works of the law, prove that "they are a law to themselves", that is, they are as it were their own law book and they themselves reveal God's law to themselves! Some of their own actions reveal that the requirements of God's moral law are written in the very constitution of their human nature. It is important to notice that this 'law' (of which the requirements are written in the natural constitution of every human being since creation), is not a different law than the law that God later revealed more clearly to the Jews through Moses (1447-1407 B.C.).

The 'conscience' is a function of the human spirit and makes moral discriminations and judgements. The conscience functions like an inward judge or inward monitor, requiring human beings to do what the law requires. The thoughts of the human conscience sometimes condemn and at other times acquit the moral conduct of humans.

Gentiles, who have never heard God's special revelation, cannot plead innocence, because they all have knowledge of God's general revelation that is written on their hearts and their conscience functions as an advocate accusing them when they violate God's law and defending them when they live according to God's law (Romans 2:14-15). Moreover, what Gentiles may be able to know about God is manifest *in* them, because they can clearly see God's eternal power and divine nature in his creation (Romans 1:19-20; cf. Psalm 19:1-6). The Gentiles are therefore never ignorant!

- **The Gentiles will be judged according to their knowledge.**

Gentiles will certainly be judged on the final judgement day. Although they have never heard God's special revelation, they have once for all sinned in Adam (Romans 5:12), are consequently born with a sinful nature (Job 14:4; Job 15:14,16; Job 25:4; Psalm 51:5), committed sins throughout their lives and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:10-12,23). The Gentiles are therefore never innocent (Romans 3:19-20)!

But because these Gentiles sin without knowing God's special revelation, God will not judge them according to the criteria of his special revelation! God will judge them according to their knowledge of his general revelation: their knowledge of God (derived from the creation) and their knowledge of God's moral law (derived from the moral law written on their hearts). *But the Gentiles will not be judged according to any law that they did not possess.*

And God will judge them according to their works (Romans 2:6). *But the Gentiles will not be punished for any work which they have not done.* The final judgement will be absolutely righteous (Romans 2:5) and absolutely fair (Romans 2:11).

- **The Gentiles will be punished according to their knowledge and works.**

The Gentiles who have never heard God's special revelation will not only be *judged* apart from God's special revelation, but will also *perish* apart from God's special revelation (Romans 2:12). Only those people, whom God chose from eternity to be saved, will hear God's special revelation (the gospel) and will be effectively called to salvation (Romans 8:29-30; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14; 2 Timothy 1:9-10). What God therefore reveals in his special revelation (the gospel) about heaven and hell is therefore not directed to the Gentiles who have never heard the gospel.

The only thing we can say about the Gentiles who have never heard the gospel is that God will judge and punish them with absolute justice and fairness! They will be judged and punished according to how they have lived in the light of the knowledge of God's general revelation which they possessed. God will punish them according to their works (Romans 2:6). "That servant, who knows his master's will and does not get ready or does not do what his master wants, will be beaten with many blows. But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked (Luke 12:47-48). There will be an exact correspondence in God's final judgement between the nature of people's sin and the punishment they deserve!

The godless and wicked cities of Sodom, Gomorrah, Tyre and Sidon did not possess the Old Testament or the New Testament revelations. Therefore the final judgement day will be more bearable for them than for the Jews living in the time of Jesus, who possessed the Old Testament and heard the gospel in the New Testament (Matthew 10:15; Matthew 11:20-24). There will therefore be many different verdicts and many different punishments in the final judgement, based on different levels of knowledge and disobedience.

God demands from Christians that their mercy should surpass their judgement (Matthew 9:13). Likewise with respect to God himself we may expect that God's mercy will also triumph over God's judgement (James 2:13)! How, is not specified in God's special revelation. God has not revealed to us everything there is to know (Deuteronomy 29:29)!

## 2. God's criterion for the judgement of the Jews (Romans 2:12b,13).

### ▪ **The Jews are *inside* God's special revelation, but have rejected the gospel.**

At the time of Paul, the people who lived under (literally 'in') God's special revelation in the Old Testament and have rejected the gospel were in general the Jews. In contrast to the majority of Gentiles at that time, the Jews sinned with full knowledge of God's special revelation in the Old Testament. And many Jews also continued to sin after hearing the gospel.

### ▪ **The Jews will be judged and punished according to their knowledge and works.**

The Jews will be judged in accordance with God's special revelation and this means in accordance with three criteria of judgement:

- According to their knowledge and works in the light of God's general revelation (in creation, in the heart and in the conscience).
- According to their knowledge and works in the light of God's special revelation in the Old Testament (in the Law and in the Prophets). They will certainly be condemned for transgressing God's laws in the Old Testament.
- And if they had heard the gospel and rejected it, according to their knowledge and response in the light of God's special revelation in the New Testament (in the gospel, which they rejected). They will certainly be condemned for their unbelief (John 3:18,36; 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9), for their neglect of doing what God requires (Matthew 25:41-46) and for their many sins that have not been forgiven (Matthew 6:14; John 9:41).

*The Jews are therefore never ignorant and also never innocent!* Jews who sin under God's special revelation will be judged and punished by God's special revelation!

With Jews there will be an exact correspondence between the nature of their sin and their punishment. But because they had much more knowledge of God and his will than the Gentiles did, their final judgement and punishment will be aggravated in accordance with the gravity of their sin (Luke 12:47-48).

### ▪ **The criterion for judgement will not simply be knowledge, but obedience of God's special revelation.**

Many Jews thought that simply possession and knowledge of the Holy Book of God (the Old Testament Scripture) would justify them. The Holy Book was revered, kissed, handled with respect, discussed, debated and preached in their midst. Every Sabbath, they heard the reading of the Book in their synagogues. Nevertheless, they did NOT DO what they heard. The Jews generally neglected the most important aspect of the Book – they did not obey its contents! They did not live according to its teachings! Jesus condemned the Pharisees, because they did not practise what they preached (Matthew 23:3; Luke 10:25-28). The Jews will be judged according to their works and not simply according to their knowledge.

### ▪ **However, no one will be justified on the basis of his obedience to the law.**

When Paul says, "Those who do the law will *certainly* be justified" (Romans 2:13), he does not imply that any Jew or anyone else besides Jesus Christ could do the law perfectly! He also does not imply that anyone could or would be justified on account of their obedience to the law. He does not imply that people's works (deeds) would be weighed on scales on the final judgement day and that some people would be declared righteous by God on account of their obedience to the law. The Bible says very clearly, "*No one* will be justified by observing the law" (Romans 3:20,28; Galatians 2:16). What Paul means in Romans 2:13 is that the criterion of judgement for Jews on the final judgement day

for Jews will not be *knowledge* of the law (the Old Testament revelation), but *doing* the law (obeying and living according to the Old Testament revelation)!

God's righteous requirement for salvation is nothing less than absolute perfect (100%) obedience to the law! Both the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 27:26) as well as the New Testament (Galatians 3:10; James 2:10) teach that all people who want to be justified or saved by keeping the law, must keep the law completely and perfectly. James 2:10 says, "Whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles *at just one point* is guilty of breaking all of it." And Galatians 3:10 says, "All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who does not *continue to do everything* written in the Book of the Law'."

The Bible does not teach that God will justify or save people on the basis of their obedience to the law. Romans 2:12b-13 teaches that God will judge those people who possess God's special revealed law by that law. God's special revealed law says in Leviticus 18:5, "Keep my decrees and laws, for the man who obeys them will live by them". Both the Old Testament (Leviticus 18:5; Ezekiel 20:11) as well as the New Testament (Romans 2:7; 10:5; Galatians 3:12) teach that if there were people who could keep the law completely and perfectly, they would be justified or saved.

However, no human being qualifies, because no one can keep the law perfectly. All people who want to be justified or saved by keeping the law are under God's curse, precisely because there is not a single person in the world who can keep the law! Romans 3:10 teaches, "There is no one who is righteous, not even one." There is not a single person in the world who will receive eternal life on the basis of doing the works of the law! So Romans 2:13 does not teach that there will be some people who will be saved or justified by doing the works of God's revealed law.

### 3. God's criterion for the judgement of the Christians (Romans 2:12b,13).

- **The Christians are *inside* God's special revelation and have accepted the gospel.**

No one is born a Christian. A person can only become a Christian by being born again (John 3:3-8). Jesus proclaimed, "The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent (change your thinking) and believe the gospel" (Mark 1:15). A person becomes a Christian by changing his old way of thinking to the new and by turning away from the old life to Jesus Christ. All Christians heard the gospel (the special revelation of God in Christ) and most Christians also possess the Bible or parts of the Bible (the special revelation of God in the Bible).

- **The Christians will be judged according to their faith and their works.**

Also the Christians will be judged in accordance with God's special revelation and this means in accordance with two criteria of judgement:

- **Genuine Christians will be judged on account of their relationship to Jesus Christ.**

All genuine Christians have been justified by their faith in Jesus Christ. This means that God has declared all genuine Christians perfectly righteous in his sight and henceforth regards and treats them as perfectly righteous (forgiven and accepted). Because Christians have already been justified (saved) by God's grace through faith, on account of what Christ has done for them, they will never be condemned to the eternal fire of hell (John 5:24), but will be publicly vindicated on the final judgement day (Matthew 25:31-34). Their names have been recorded in the Lamb's book of life (Revelation 10:20; 20:15) and they will inherit the new earth together with Christ. Jesus Christ made atonement for all the sins of those who genuinely believe in Jesus Christ (Romans 3:24-25; 5:9-10; cf. Mark 10:45). He made atonement for their past sins, their present sins and their future sins (Hebrews 8:12). The eternal life they received (Romans 2:7) consists of a personal fellowship with God in Jesus Christ (John 17:3), possession of the peace that passes all understanding (Philippians 4:7), being filled with inexpressible and glorious joy (1 Peter 1:8), knowing the glory of God in the face of Christ (2 Corinthians 4:6), experiencing God's great love for them (5:5; 8:29) and living in the presence of God in Christ on the new earth forever (Matthew 25:46; Revelation 21:1-5).

- **Genuine Christians will also be judged by their works in the light of God's special revelation in the whole Bible.**

This judgement will not determine their *salvation* (justification), but their *reward* at the final judgement (1 Corinthians 3:12-15). They will be judged according to how they have lived their justified (saved) lives (1 Corinthians 3:11). Their lives will be judged in accordance with all the moral laws in the Bible and in accordance with all the teachings of Jesus Christ in the Bible. Their works will be judged in order to test *the quality of their faith* and *the fruit of their salvation*.

- **Nominal Christians will certainly be condemned.**

They will be condemned for their unbelief (John 3:18,36; 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9), for their neglect of doing what God requires (Matthew 25:41-46) and for their many sins that have not been forgiven (Matthew 6:14; John 9:41).

- **The Christians are justified on the basis of Christ's work of righteousness and by means of their faith.**

No Christian will be justified on the basis of his obedience to the law or any of his works! God's righteous requirement for salvation is nothing less than absolute perfect obedience to the law. If there were Christians who could keep the law completely and perfectly, they would be justified or saved. But no Christian qualifies, because no Christian can keep the law perfectly (Romans 3:10,23; Galatians 3:10; James 2:10).

However, Christians are justified (saved), not on the basis of their own works, but *on the basis of* God's completed work of grace through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The basis for their salvation (justification) is NOT what they do, but what Jesus Christ has already done for them! And Christians receive their salvation or justification (that is, the perfect and complete righteousness of Christ)(1 Corinthians 1:30) because they believe in Jesus Christ. Their faith is not the ground or reason of their salvation, but *the means* by which they receive salvation from God.

- **The criterion for judgement will not simply be historic faith, but faith that bears works as its fruit.**

The criterion of judgement of Christians on the final judgement day will not be *knowledge* of the law (the Old Testament revelation) or the gospel (the New Testament revelation), but *obeying and living* according to the revelation in the Bible!

- **Christians are saved (justified) on the basis of Christ's righteousness.**

Christians will never be saved or justified by a faith that is a pure historic faith, that is, a faith without the specific works that belong to salvation (James 2:14-26). God's judgement will not respect merely faith or justification by faith in the abstract (cf. James 2:19). He will respect faith and justification by faith in its relationship to all the elements that comprise the saved state. In salvation, God's grace may not be emphasised to the extent that the Christian's way of life is overlooked. Believers are not simply *saved from* evil and every kind of unrighteousness, but also *saved to* live a life of holiness and every kind of righteousness (Romans 6:19; Romans 8:29; Ephesians 1:1:4). They are not simply *saved from* a meaningless and empty life, but also *saved to* live a very meaningful and fruitful life in good works.

- **Christians are rewarded on the basis of Christ's righteousness.**

Christians will also be rewarded, not on the basis of their own accomplishments and works (which are always imperfect), but on the basis of what God in Christ accomplished for them, namely, the completed work of salvation of Jesus Christ (which is completely perfect). They will be rewarded, not because they did good works, but simply because God has been very gracious to them in Jesus Christ. Also all rewards are by grace!

However, they will be rewarded in accordance with their own works. Their good works are for them the proof or clear evidence that they belong to those people whom God has saved by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-10). To some extent their good works will also be the measure of their reward (Matthew 25:20-21; 1 Corinthians 3:14-15; 1 Corinthians 9:25; 2 Timothy 4:6-8; Revelation 14:13). The good works of Christians are therefore also the criterion of God's judgement of Christians.

- **The criterion for good works is God's moral laws.**

They are the Ten Commandments and all the other moral teachings in the Bible. The moral law of God has not been abrogated for Christians. Although Christians are no longer "under the law" (Romans 6:14), they nevertheless are "not free from God's law, but under Christ's law" (Romans 13:8-10; Mark 12:30-31; 1 Corinthians 9:21). The moral laws of the Bible are *not the means* of justification, but they are *the guidelines how to live* the justified or saved life as Christians.

**Conclusion.** When Paul says, "God will give to *each person* according to his works" (Romans 2:6), he includes Christians. The good works of Christians, as *the evidences* of faith and salvation by grace, are therefore the criterion of God's judgement also for the Christian. The good works of Christians have an indispensable place in the biblical doctrine of salvation (Matthew 5:16; Galatians 6:9-10; Ephesians 2:8-10; Titus 2:14; James 2:14-26).

### C. ROMANS 2:16. HOW GOD WILL JUDGE PEOPLE ON THE FINAL JUDGEMENT DAY

- **People will be judged according to all their works (deeds).**

Not just the outward actions of people, but also the secret or hidden actions of people will be judged (Ecclesiastes 12:14). This is especially directed towards the unbelieving Jews, who specialised in *correct outward behaviour*. In Romans chapter 2, Paul had repeatedly exposed the fallacy of Jewish presumption. Now he also exposes the foolishness of Jewish externalism. God's judgement will be according to the truth, that is, according to the actual thoughts, motives, attitudes and actions of people. And it will certainly include all secret and shameful actions (2 Corinthians 4:2; Ephesians 5:12).

Jesus said to the hypocritical Pharisees, "'You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. ... You are like unmarked graves, which men walk over without knowing it" (Luke 11:39,44). "You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness" (Matthew 23:27-28).

▪ **People will be judged according to Paul's gospel (Romans 2:16).**

This cannot mean that the gospel will be the universal criterion of God's judgement. The law as a part of God's Old Testament special revelation is not the universal criterion of God's judgement (Romans 2:12). Also the gospel as a part of God's New Testament special revelation cannot be the universal criterion of God's judgement (Romans 2:16).

The universal criterion of God's judgement will be *the works of people* (Romans 2:6), that is, how they have lived in accordance to the light of revelation they have received. What Paul means to say in verse 16, is that the gospel proclaims that God will judge the good and bad works of people through the Judge Jesus Christ on the final judgement day (Matthew 25:31-46; John 5:22,27-29). The proclamation of God's righteous judgement of all people and of all their secrets and deeds is an outstanding feature of the Christian message.

On the final judgement day, all people that have ever lived will stand before the throne of Jesus Christ to be judged (Romans 2:16). The book of life will be opened and if anyone's name was not found written in the Lamb's book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:12b,15; 21:27). The book of life contains all the names of all true believers in Jesus Christ (John 5:24; John 6:37; John 10:28-30; John 17:12). Also other books will be opened and people will be judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books (Revelation 20:12a,c; Matthew 16:27). Believers in Christ will not be condemned to eternal death (John 5:24), but they will be judged for how they lived as Christians (2 Corinthians 5:10). People will not be judged for the sins of other people (Ezekiel 18:20). But people will be judged according to the *quality* of their own works (1 Corinthians 3:12-15).

*God's grace does not dispense with God's judgement! The proclamation of the gospel must include the proclamation of God's grace as well as the proclamation of God's judgement!* The final judgement day is therefore an essential part of the proclamation of the gospel.