

ACCUSATION

Brian Carroll / General Adult

Unashamed - A Study of Romans / Romans 2:12–16

No one will stand before God unaware, because the knowledge of right and wrong has been written on the human conscience. God's judgment is perfectly measured to what each person has been given, and on the final day, the strongest witness against us may be the voice within us.

Introduction

- Way back when my oldest son was a toddler, he couldn't have been three years old yet, it was just the two of us at the house one afternoon.
 - I was in the kitchen when he came through the den with a certain look in his eye, a big black mark on his cheek, and a giant black Sharpie in his hand.
 - Now, parents, you know exactly what I'm talking about.
 - There are certain looks your children give you that instantly tell you, "Something has happened."
 - He wasn't crying.
 - He wasn't upset.
 - He was just trying to act normal.
 - Which, of course, made him look even more suspicious.
- I knew immediately that he had gotten into something.
 - So I started looking around.
 - It didn't take long.
 - I walked into my study and discovered his masterpiece.
 - The desk had been colored.
 - The wall around the desk had been colored.

- Apparently, he had decided that my office desperately needed some artistic flair.
- And the color scheme on the walls just happened to match the color of that black mark on his face.
- It didn't take Sherlock Holmes to solve that mystery.
 - The evidence was overwhelming.
 - There were marks on the wall.
 - Marks on the desk.
 - Marks on his face.
 - And, perhaps most incriminating of all, he was still holding the weapon.
- So I called him in and asked a simple question.
 - "Son, did you do this?"
 - And without hesitation, he shook his head.
 - "No."
 - Not "Maybe."
 - Not "I don't remember."
 - Not "Accidentally."
 - Just a flat-out denial.
- And then I noticed something else.
 - The Sharpie had disappeared.
 - Somewhere between being caught and being questioned, he had hidden the evidence.
 - Now, here's the fascinating part.
 - Nobody had ever sat him down and explained obstruction of justice.

- We had never discussed perjury.
- He had never attended a seminar entitled "How to Avoid Accountability."
- To this day, I don't remember ever teaching him how to lie.
- In fact, most of his childhood was spent with his mother and me trying to teach him not to.
- And yet somehow, at three years old, he knew enough to deny it and knew enough to hide the marker.
- And, honestly, that raises a more interesting question.
 - How did he know?
 - How did he know he needed to lie?
 - How did he know he needed to hide?
 - How did he know he ought to feel guilty?
 - He wasn't quite old enough to grasp the 10 Commandments
 - Nobody had assigned him a theology book.
 - Nobody had given him a lecture on ethics.
 - And yet there was already something inside him that knew.
- Now, when I was growing up, Disney told us that everybody had a little cricket sitting on their shoulder.
 - Jiminy Cricket would pop up and sing,
 - *"Always let your conscience be your guide."*
 - And that's cute.
 - But Jiminy Cricket isn't nearly big enough for what Paul is talking about in [Romans 2](#).
 - Paul isn't describing a cartoon cricket wearing a top hat.
 - He's describing a witness.

- A witness God Himself has placed inside every human heart.
 - A witness that occasionally accuses.
 - A witness that occasionally excuses.
 - A witness that reminds us that some things are right and some things are wrong.
 - And if we're honest, we've all heard that voice.
 - We've all replayed conversations in our minds.
 - We've all said things we wish we could take back.
 - We've all tried to justify ourselves.
 - We've all tried to explain ourselves.
- And we've all discovered something unsettling.
 - Sometimes nobody else knows.
 - But we know.
 - And we know that we know.
- Paul says that is no accident.
 - He is not teaching that people know everything.
 - He is teaching that nobody stands before God completely unaware.
 - The witness has been with us all along.
 - And one day, according to [Romans 2](#), that witness will take the stand.

Scripture Reading

Romans 2:12–16 ESV

¹² For all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law.

¹³ For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified.

¹⁴ For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law.

¹⁵ They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them

¹⁶ on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.

- When my son stood in front of me that day, marked by the black mark of his indiscretion, he wasn't on trial because I was arbitrary.
 - He wasn't on trial because I was looking for someone to punish.
 - He was on trial because something had happened, he had done it, and we both knew it.
 - That's the same kind of courtroom Paul opens in our passage this morning
- But before Paul gets to the courtroom of conscience, he's already been in another courtroom in this chapter
 - Last week we were in verses 1 through 11.
 - And the person Paul had in his sights was the person who knew enough to judge others but somehow exempted themselves from the same judgment.
 - The self-appointed moral critic. The person who looks at [Romans 1](#) — at the catalog of Gentile sin — and nods along approvingly.
 - “Yes. Those people deserve judgment.”
 - And Paul turned to that person and said: you are without excuse.
 - Because the same standard you apply to others, God applies to you.

- We said it this way last week: the delay is not approval. The delay is mercy.
 - God's patience is not God's indifference.
 - His kindness is meant to lead you to repentance — not to confirm that you don't need it.
- Now Paul widens the lens.
 - He's done with the self-righteous judge.
 - Now he's talking about everybody.
 - Jew and Gentile. Religious and pagan.
 - Insider and outsider.
- And the question on the table is the same question it's always been:
 - How does a perfectly just God judge a world full of people who received vastly different amounts of revelation?
 - That's where we are. That's what Paul is answering.
- And the first thing the Apostle points out is this...

God's Judgment is based on the amount of revelation received. (vv. 12-13)

- Paul opens with a legal principle that governs everything that follows.
 - Verse 12 draws a clean line: those who sinned without the Law perish without the Law — those who sinned under the Law are judged by the Law.
 - Paul isn't creating two standards.
 - He's describing one standard applied with perfect precision to two different situations.
- The Jew had Torah.
 - Generations of revelation.
 - The oracles of God.

- The commandments carved in stone, read aloud in synagogue, memorized from childhood.
- That's an enormous privilege — and an enormous responsibility.
- The greater the revelation, the greater the accountability.
- The Gentile had none of that.
 - No Sinai.
 - No prophets.
 - No scripture.
 - It would be a monstrous injustice for God to hold them to a standard they never possessed.
 - We certainly understand that.
 - It would be akin to the government passing a law today and then going to prosecute the people who broke the law yesterday.
 - So nobody was being held responsible for following the law of the Old Testament who never had any kind of access to the Old Testament.
- So Paul is establishing something before he argues anything else:
 - **God never judges a person for rejecting revelation they never had.**
 - That's not soft theology.
 - That's the justice of God.
 - He is not arbitrary.
 - He is not capricious.
 - He doesn't move the target.
 - He doesn't prosecute people for crimes they couldn't have known were crimes.

- Some of you are immediately processing an important question...
“Wouldn’t we be better off if we never knew the Bible...if God doesn’t judge based on what we don’t have?”
 - Put a pin in that very important question as we will revisit it in just a little bit.
- When we get to verse 13, Paul sharpens the argument even more... the standard isn't *possession* of the law. It's *doing* it.
 - "*It is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified.*"
 - Paul is not saying anyone will be justified by doing the law.
 - He’s showing what perfect justice would require — and why we all fall short.
 - This lands on the Jews first. They had the Law.
 - They read the Law. They could recite the Law.
 - But hearing isn't doing. Possession isn't obedience.
 - And if justification requires doing — perfectly, completely, without exception — then the Jew with the Law is not in a better position before God.
 - They're in a more accountable one.
- Don’t miss this — we can only be justified by perfectly following the law without exception.
 - There is no wiggle room.
 - If you break a law, you are a law breaker.
 - And if you’ve read your Old Testaments, you know that there’s no way anybody can follow the law perfectly.
 - Especially when you begin to begin to consider motives and the sins of the heart and the mind.

- If you have the specific revelation of the law and you fail to follow it, then God is perfectly just to judge you according to the standard.
- So, are we better off if we don't know the law, if we've never heard the Gospel?
 - No, you aren't better off, because without the Bible, you still have a damaged conscience convicting you.
 - Ignorance doesn't save you; it just leaves you with the diagnosis and no knowledge of the Cure.
 - And that is the devastating reality of Paul's second point...

Nobody is as ignorant as they claim (vv. 14-15)

- The Jew who has the law is without excuse — so surely the Gentiles who do not have the law are in a better place.
 - They've never heard Moses.
 - Never set foot into a synagogue.
 - They don't know the Word of God.
 - Not so fast.
- The Gentiles aren't any better off because they don't possess the law.
 - Remember - they already have creation (You can go back and check out sermon from May 24 if you need a refresher)
 - Creation has been a sign that God has given to us that constantly points back to him.
 - It reveals his eternal nature and his divine power.
 - Nobody can claim ignorance because God has given us this gift.
 - The only reason we miss it is because we have this universal sin problem of truth suppression.
 - We take that which is plainly known and we press it down and attempt to ignore it or misinterpret it.

- But there is a second witness that Paul calls to the stand in his metaphorical courtroom.
- Notice Paul's careful language in verse 15.
 - He doesn't say the Gentiles *have* the law.
 - He says the *work* of the law is written on their hearts. That distinction matters.
- Torah is specific.
 - Torah is detailed.
 - Torah is Sinai and stone tablets and six hundred thirteen commandments.
 - What the Gentile has is not that.
- What the Gentile has is the moral architecture that Torah reflects.
 - The internal knowledge that some things are right and some things are wrong.
 - Not the blueprint — but the building it describes.
 - You don't need Leviticus to know that betraying a friend is wrong.
 - You don't need Deuteronomy to know that exploiting a vulnerable person is wrong.
 - You don't need the Ten Commandments posted on your wall to know that what you just did — whatever it was — was wrong.
- Every human civilization in history has known these things.
 - They've disagreed on the edges.
 - They've suppressed the implications.
 - They've constructed elaborate justifications.
 - But at the center — murder, theft, betrayal, injustice — there is universal recognition.

- That recognition didn't come from Moses.
- It came from God, written into the fabric of what it means to be human.
- But remember, looming large over all of this is our ongoing suppression of truth.
 - That leads to a conscience that is damaged.
 - This is why Paul says it can both accuse and excuse.
 - *Their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them.*
 - Paul is describing an internal courtroom that every single person in here has been a part of.
 - If our consciences weren't damaged, then they would only accuse us.
 - They would be the consistent early warning system.
 - But that is not the case. As a result of sin and the suppression of truth, our thoughts are conflicted...and we have both a prosecutor and a defense attorney in our mind.
- We know the prosecutor's voice:
 - *"I shouldn't have said that."*
 - *"That wasn't right and I knew it wasn't right."*
 - *"What kind of person does something like that?"*
- But we also know the defense attorney's voice:
 - *"Nobody will ever find out."*
 - *"Everybody does this."*
 - *"After what they did to me, I deserved this."*
 - *"It's not that big a deal."*
- Both voices are real.
 - Both voices are active.

- And Paul's point is that this internal debate — this courtroom drama playing out behind the eyes of every human being — is itself evidence.
- It is testimony.
- It is proof that moral awareness exists independent of any external law.
- The Gentile who has never read a Bible has still prosecuted himself a thousand times in the privacy of his own mind.
- Here's what makes this so devastating.
 - The defense attorney inside us is very good at his job in the moment.
 - When we want to do something we know is wrong, he shows up immediately with a full brief.
 - Justifications. Rationalizations. Comparisons to worse people. Extenuating circumstances.
 - He is articulate and persuasive and available around the clock.
 - But he doesn't stay on the defendant's side of the courtroom.
 - The same voice that said *nobody will find out* has a way of popping up six months later declaring, *you know what you did* at three in the morning.
 - The same internal counsel that argued *you deserved this* eventually turns around and argues *you should be ashamed of yourself*.
- This is what Paul means by conflicting thoughts.
 - The internal debate never fully resolves.
 - The conscience that can be silenced in the moment has a long memory.
 - And on the day Paul describes in verse 16 — the day when the secrets of men are laid open — that long memory becomes testimony.
- So what does that mean?

- Paul is not saying conscience saves anyone.
- He is not pointing the Gentile toward his conscience as a guide to God.
- He is not suggesting that if you listen carefully enough to your inner voice you will find your way to righteousness.
- He is saying something far more sobering.
 - He is saying that the internal witness you carry — the one that has accused you and excused you a thousand times — will be present in the courtroom.
 - It cannot be cross-examined out of existence.
 - It cannot be suppressed on that day the way it can be suppressed on this one.
 - It will testify to what you knew, when you knew it, and what you did anyway.
- Nobody arrives at the judgment seat of Christ genuinely ignorant.
 - The Gentile without Torah is not without witness.
 - He carries the witness inside him.
 - Which means the plea of ignorance is not available.
 - Which means every mouth is shut.
 - Which means everybody in this room — regardless of how they were raised, what church they attended, what religious tradition they came from, or whether they darkened the door of a church at all — stands in need of something conscience cannot provide.
 - **Conscience is evidence. It is not a savior.**
- And if my own heart testifies against me — if the very thoughts inside my head will one day be called as witnesses — then I don't need a better conscience.
 - Our problem is not that we lack a witness.

- The problem is that the witness cannot acquit us.
- I need someone who can answer the accusations.

The Secrets Will Not Remain Secret (v. 16)

- Everything Paul has argued leads here.
 - He has established that God judges fairly.
 - He has established that conscience leaves every person without excuse.
 - Now he lands the argument where it was always going.
 - *"On that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus."*
 - Paul has been building a courtroom argument.
 - Now he names the day the courtroom convenes.
- Paul is describing a specific future event — a day that is coming with absolute certainty.
 - We tend to live our lives as though that day is theoretical.
 - We treat it the way we treat a doctor's warning about our health — we acknowledge it intellectually and then go back to living as though it doesn't apply to us personally.
 - But Paul says *that day*
 - It is **THAT** day, not **A** day.
 - The day already fixed on the calendar of eternity.
 - And on that day, everything changes.
- Paul said, "God judges the secrets of men"
 - Not the public sins.
 - Not the obvious failures.

- Not the things everybody already knows about.
- The secrets.
- I bet every one of us in this room is carrying some secrets.
 - Something our spouse doesn't know.
 - Something our closest friend doesn't know.
 - Something we have never spoken aloud to another human being.
 - Something we have worked very hard to keep compartmentalized — over here is my public life, my church life, my reputation — and over there, in a room nobody else enters, is the thing I don't talk about.
- Paul says God judges that room.
 - Not just the living room you let people into.
 - The locked room.
 - The room you've decorated with rationalizations and furnished with excuses and dead-bolted against every intrusion.
 - That room gets opened.
- My son hid the Sharpie. But the drawing was still on the wall.
 - The hiding doesn't undo the doing.
 - The secret doesn't become innocent by virtue of being secret.
 - In fact the secrecy itself is testimony — because you don't hide what you aren't ashamed of.
- Paul calls this final judgment *his gospel*.
 - We don't usually think of judgment as gospel.
 - We think of gospel as the good news that rescues us from judgment.
 - But Paul brackets them together — the coming judgment and the good news of Christ are not opposites.
 - They are partners.

- Here's why.
 - The gospel only makes sense against the backdrop of real judgment.
 - If there is no day of reckoning, if the secrets don't matter, if the courtroom never convenes — then what exactly did Christ die for?
 - What are we being saved from?
 - The judgment Paul describes is what gives the cross its weight.
 - The cross is not a beautiful gesture.
 - It is not a moral example.
 - It is not God expressing his feelings about sin in a general way.
 - It is the specific, judicial, substitutionary answer to the specific, judicial, inevitable judgment Paul is describing in verse 16.
 - You cannot fully preach the gospel without the judgment.
 - And you cannot fully feel the weight of the judgment without the gospel.
 - Paul holds them together because they belong together.
- But then he reminds us that the judge is Christ...
 - Not conscience.
 - Conscience has been the witness — present, testifying, accusing and excusing throughout the argument.
 - But conscience is not on the bench on that day.
 - Conscience is in the witness box.
 - Not the law.
 - The law has been the standard — the external revelation that measures the Jew, the internal moral architecture that measures the Gentile.
 - But the law is not the judge. The law is the measurement.

- The judge is Christ.
- And here is where the argument becomes either the most terrifying thing Paul has ever said or the most liberating — depending entirely on your relationship to the judge.
- For the person who has never trusted Christ, the judge is a stranger.
 - Worse than a stranger — a witness to everything.
 - Every secret. Every rationalization. Every moment the conscience accused and was silenced.
 - He was there for all of it. And on that day he sits on the bench with perfect knowledge and perfect justice and not one secret remaining secret.
- But for the person who has trusted Christ — the judge is their advocate.
 - The one who answered the accusations.
 - The one who absorbed the judgment.
 - The one who stood in the courtroom on their behalf and said *I have already paid for this*.
- Paul says in [Romans 8:1](#) — *there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus*.
 - No condemnation.
 - Not reduced condemnation.
 - Not manageable condemnation. None.
- Because the judge and the substitute are the same person.
- This means that conscience is not your savior. It is your witness.
 - The law is not your savior. It is your measurement.
 - Religion is not your savior. It is your testimony about how much revelation you received.

- None of those things can answer the accusations.
- None of them can open the locked room and clean out what's inside.
- None of them can stand between you and that day.
- Only Christ can do that.
 - And this is why Paul calls the judgment *his gospel*.
 - Because the same Christ who will judge the secrets of men is the Christ who died to forgive them.
 - The same bench where your secrets will be laid open is the bench where your advocate already sits — if you have trusted him.
- The question [Romans 2](#) forces on every person in the room is not *am I good enough*.
 - Nobody is good enough.
 - The conscience already knows that.
- The question is *what have you done with Christ*.
 - Because on that day, he is the only answer to the accusation.

Invitation (Title Slide)

- There is something almost terrifying about realizing that the witness God calls to the stand is not a stranger.
 - It is not an enemy.
 - It is not even Satan.
 - It is the voice you have heard your entire life.
 - The voice you tried to silence.
 - The voice you argued with.
 - The voice you excused.
 - The voice that kept you awake.

- And if even that witness testifies against me, then I don't need self-improvement.
- I need a Savior.
- Every person in this room has a case pending.
 - The evidence has been accumulating since the day you were born.
 - Your own conscience has been building the file — every accusation, every excuse, every moment you knew and looked away.
- That file gets opened.
 - The only question is whether you stand before that bench alone — or whether you stand there with someone who has already answered for everything in the file.
 - That's the gospel.
 - Not that good people get into heaven.
 - That guilty people — people whose own hearts testify against them — can be forgiven.
 - Because the judge became the substitute.
 - And the substitute paid everything the file required.
- And the only response to this is to place your trust in Christ.
 - If you have never trusted Christ — not your church, not your tradition, not your conscience — but Christ himself, today is the day to do that.