

# THE TRINITY REVIEW

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare [are] not fleshly but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. And they will be ready to punish all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled. (2 Corinthians 10:3-6)

Number 326 © 2015 The Trinity Foundation Post Office Box 68, Unicoi, Tennessee 37692 March-April 2015  
Email: tjtrinityfound@aol.com Website: www.trinityfoundation.org Telephone: 423.743.0199 Fax: 423.743.2005

## **Romans 2:13 and the Jealousy Narrative Part 2** by Timothy F. Kauffman

It was in this same context that Ezekiel implored the righteous to stop trusting in their own righteousness, and implored the wicked to turn from their wickedness.

When I shall say to the righteous, that he shall surely live; if he trust to his own righteousness, and commit iniquity, *all his righteousnesses shall not be remembered*; but for his iniquity that he hath committed, he shall die for it... But if the wicked turn from his wickedness, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall live thereby. (*Ezekiel* 33:13, 19)

It is not insignificant that when Jesus spoke the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector, He used the same terms that Ezekiel had, addressing it “unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others” (*Luke* 18:9). The meaning of the parable was that “every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted” (*Luke* 18:14), which is, significantly, the message of *Ezekiel* 17. The message of Ezekiel and the message of Jesus is one of repentance, and it is addressed to all, self-righteous and sinner, Jew and Gentile alike. We are particularly interested, therefore, in Paul’s choice of words in *Romans* 2:6-10, as he simply recapitulates Ezekiel’s message of *Ezekiel* 16 and 17, and Jesus’ parables of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector (*Luke* 18:9-15) and the Two Sons (*Mathew* 21:28-32). He describes what repentance does, and does not, look like:

- (6) Who will render to every man according to his deeds:
- (7) To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life:
- (8) But unto them that are contentious (ἐξ ἐριθείας), and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath,

- (9) Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile;
- (10) But glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile.

The word rendered as “contentious” in *Romans* 2:8 is ἐξ ἐριθείας, and actually refers not to the disputatious and argumentative (as it is typically translated), but to “every one that exalteth himself” and “trusted to his own righteousness,” the sin of self-promotion and vainglorious self-esteem (compare *Philippians* 2:3; *James* 3:14). It is “a desire to put one’s self forward,” in the sense of self-commendation—the very sin prohibited in *Ezekiel* 33:13.<sup>1</sup> Paul is not here contrasting good works unto justification with bad works unto damnation. Instead, he is contrasting repentance with impenitence. The chapter to this point has been focused on *repentance*, not on justification (*i.e.*, “the goodness of God leadeth thee to *repentance*... But after thy hardness and *impenitent* heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath...” —*Romans* 2:4-5). This repentance is noticeably lacking in the self-promoting hypocrisy of the scribes, priests, and Pharisees, yet is found conspicuously in the patient continuance of the harlots, lepers, tax collectors, Gentiles, and Samaritans as they turn from their evil works (*Luke* 3:10-14, *Matthew* 21:32). Simply put, *Romans* 2:6-10 says that he who humbles himself will be exalted, and he who exalts himself will be made low. Thus Paul is merely recapitulating Ezekiel’s message by contrasting true repentance of turning from evil works with false repentance that consists of shameless, hypocritical, self-promotion that serves as a cloak for disobedience, “for with their mouth

<sup>1</sup> “Canvassing for public office, intriguing,” (see its use in antiquity, Aristotle, *Politics* 1302b4, 1303a14). “Selfish or factious ambition” (Walter Bauer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, University of Chicago Press, 1979, 309).

they shew much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness” (*Ezekiel* 33:31).

In light of *the Jealousy Narrative*, we also see here in *Romans* 2:6-10 Paul’s recapitulation of Jesus’ “Nexus of Jewishness” that we identified earlier. It is read as a contrast between the self-commendation of the elder son, the Pharisee, the Rich Young Ruler and the hypocrites—“Lo, these many years do I serve thee...” (*Luke* 15:29), “I fast twice in the week, I give tithes...” (*Luke* 18:12), “All these have I kept from my youth...” (*Luke* 18:21), who “sound a trumpet” to announce their almsgiving (*Matthew* 6:2)—and the actual humble obedience of the harlot, the Samaritan, the younger son, the leper, and the humble—“for she loved much” (*Luke* 7:47); “[he] was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves” (*Luke* 10:36), “I...am no more worthy to be called thy son” (*Luke* 15:21), “[he] returned to give glory to God” (*Luke* 17:18), who give their alms “in secret” (*Matthew* 6:4). The former all commended their own righteousness in self-exaltation with trumpets and fanfare but continued in disobedience, whereas the latter fled from their own righteousness and nevertheless repented and obeyed the Law. The former are they who were asked to work in their Father’s vineyard and replied “I go, sir”: and went not.” The latter are they who initially refused to work in their Father’s vineyard, but afterward “repented and went” (*Matthew* 21:28-32). The former talked about doing the Law, but the latter actually *did* it. They are the fulfillment of God’s promise, “And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, *and do them*” (*Ezekiel* 36:26). To the perpetual horror of Jesus’ self-righteous listeners, that promise was being fulfilled in the Gentile “Nexus of Jewishness,” and not in the priests, scribes, Levites, and Pharisees.

God is no respecter of persons (*Romans* 2:11), so of course the unrepentant will suffer judgment, be they Jew or Gentile, and the repentant will enjoy salvation, be they Jew or Gentile. The problem for the Jews is not that God forgives the repentant. The problem for the Jews was that God had granted that repentance to the Gentiles, eliciting the age-old self-righteous and jealous indignation: “That’s not fair!” Thus, when Paul says, “For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified” he is plainly speaking of believing, repentant Gentiles of the order of the “Nexus of Jewishness”—the harlot, the Samaritan, the centurion, the leper, and the tax collector—or, in this context, the formerly unclean Gentiles of *Romans* 1. It is these who are justified *vis-à-vis* the unrepentant Jews who are not. By this Paul makes obedience a distinguishing characteristic of God’s justified people—for that is precisely what Ezekiel had prophesied (36:27), and what Jesus had taught (*John* 13:25, 15:10), and what John had foreseen (*Revelation* 12:17, 14:12)—and thus Paul’s earnest desire is “to make the Gentiles

obedient” (*Romans* 15:18). In this he is merely advancing *the Jealousy Narrative*, but he is very, very far from commending a works-righteousness for justification.

The historical temptation here has been to read *works causality* into the justification of the Gentiles in *Romans* 2:13, but Paul will have nothing of it. Christ is just as much “the end of the law for righteousness” in *Romans* 2 as He is “the end of the law for righteousness” in *Romans* 10. Certainly “Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, ‘That the man which doeth those things shall live by them’” (*Romans* 10:5), but Paul dismisses that righteousness and speaks instead of a righteousness that is by faith. In this we note that Paul has done with Ezekiel in *Romans* 2 what he does with Moses in *Romans* 10. Ezekiel, after all, described a “righteousness which is of the law,” as well: “And I gave them my statutes, and shewed them my judgments, *which if a man do, he shall even live in them*” (20:11); “and they despised my judgments, *which if a man do, he shall even live in them*” (20:13); “they walked not in my statutes, neither kept my judgments to do them, *which if a man do, he shall even live in them*” (20:21).

In the midst of Ezekiel’s appeals to obedience as well as the command that both the wicked and the righteous “get a new heart and a new spirit,” what comes plainly to the fore is the futility of man’s attempts to establish his own righteousness and bring about his own rebirth. Finding none repentant, and finding none with new hearts and new spirits, the Lord announces “I will cut off from thee the righteous and the wicked” together (*Ezekiel* 21:3-4), because “I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it: *but I found none*” (22:30). Lacking a Savior, the self-righteous and the wicked would perish together—the very point Paul makes in *Romans* 2:12, “For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law.”

The historical Jewish response to Ezekiel’s admonition, as the succeeding centuries demonstrated, was to redouble their efforts to establish a righteousness before God based on the Law, while hoping for a “soft” standard of judgment on Judgment Day, Lusk’s “fatherly justice” that is in fact a compromise with unrighteousness. Instead, God provided the new heart and new spirit Himself (*Ezekiel* 36:26) because His people could not provide their own. Likewise, because no one righteous could be found to “stand in the gap” for His people, the Father provided Jesus Who came to Earth to “stand in the gap” before Him, for His people had no righteousness of their own to plead.

The problem for the Jews in this scenario is that when God had granted that new heart and that new Spirit and found “a Man among them, that should...stand in the gap before

Me,” it was the Gentiles who were the beneficiaries of His grace, eliciting the response in *Romans* 3:1-5 “What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision?...[is] the faith of God without effect?... Is God unrighteous...?” Paul had anticipated such a response of jealous indignation and cries of injustice, and pointed back to Christ as the solution to the false dilemma created by Jewish jealousy. If God’s promise had been to Abraham’s “seed, through the law,” their objection might receive a hearing, but He had not. If God had justified the ungodly without penalty, the Jews might have a case, but He had not. His promise had been to Abraham’s descendants according to faith, and He had kept that promise. He had provided the Man “to stand in the gap before Me” to propitiate their sins, and satisfied the unbending requirements of His own standard of justice. Therefore the charges of God’s alleged unfaithfulness and injustice fall flat. He keeps His promises and is simultaneously “just, and the justifier” of the ungodly:

Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: *that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.* (*Romans* 3:24-26)

Where then, is boasting? Paul asks in 3:27, hearkening back to 2:8 (ἐξ ἐπιθειας). Where is the shameless, hypocritical self-promotion and trusting in one’s own righteousness? It is excluded by the law of faith (3:27), and on this basis Paul proceeds unwavering toward his conclusion that God does not justify “him that worketh,” but “him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly” (*Romans* 4:5), for Jesus “in due time” indeed had “died for the ungodly” (*Romans* 5:6)—the very offense that had been a stumbling block to the Jews in Ezekiel’s day—“The way of the Lord is not equal!” (*Ezekiel* 18:25)—and in Jesus’ day—“a friend of publicans and sinners!” (*Luke* 7:34). Paul did not offer a “righteousness which is of the law” in *Romans* 2 only to rescind it in *Romans* 10, and he certainly did not commend a “soft righteousness” of Lusk’s imagination. Of course the “doers of the law will be justified” (*Romans* 2:13). They are the ungodly Gentiles and Samaritans of *Romans* 1 who “believeth on him” and are justified by faith alone (*Romans* 3:28) on account of Christ’s righteousness alone (*Romans* 3:24-26).

In this, Paul is consistent with Christ’s application of the *Jealousy Narrative* in the *Gospels*. Jesus’ application of the *Narrative* involved a contrast between the lawlessness of the Jews with the obedience of the lepers, tax collectors, harlots, Samaritans, and Gentiles, but He consistently focuses on their *faith* for salvation. Although the Samaritan leper was glorifying God in accordance with the Law, Jesus

says, “Arise, go thy way: *thy faith* hath made thee whole” (*Luke* 17:19). The Roman Centurion was known for his love for God’s people in accordance with the Law, but Jesus highlights *his faith* (*Luke* 7:9). Jesus likened the harlots and tax collectors to the first son who “did the will of his father” (*Matthew* 21:29-31) in accordance with the Law, but when He explained the meaning of the Parable, He observed that John the Baptist came preaching, and “the publicans and the harlots *believed* him” (*Matthew* 21:32). Jesus said of the harlot at the Pharisee’s house, “she loved much” (*Luke* 7:47) in accordance with the Law, but then he turned to her and said, “*Thy faith* hath saved thee” (*Luke* 7:50). On all these occasions, the objects of Jesus’ teaching lessons were performing good works in accordance with the Law (doers of the Law), and in fact were exceeding the Jews (hearers only) in their obedience, but He does not point to the Law as the instrument of their healing or their salvation. *He points to faith*. We should not be surprised that Paul takes the same approach in *Romans* 2. The wicked Gentiles of *Romans* 1 have been given new hearts and a new spirit, they have heard the preaching of the Law unto repentance and have believed, and by that faith alone they are justified, for “we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law” (*Romans* 3:28).

Thus, the meaning of *Romans* 2:13, by logical deduction, is this: “For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified, *and that by faith alone*.” This is what made the Jews jealous in *Ezekiel*; it is what made the Jews jealous in the *Gospels*; it is what made the Jews jealous in *Acts*; and it is what made the Jews jealous in *Romans*. Believing Gentiles are obeying as if they were Jews and as Abraham’s true descendants are justified by faith alone, while unbelieving Jews are disobeying as if they were Gentiles, resting on the law for righteousness, and seeking but not finding that righteousness at all.

On this point, Augustine agrees: “‘the doers of the law shall be justified’ must be so understood as that we may know that they are not otherwise doers of the law, unless they be justified, so that justification does not subsequently accrue to them as doers of the law, but justification precedes them as doers of the law” (*Treatise on the Spirit and the Letter*, 45).

Obedience to the law is the outward attribute of God’s justified people, *but they are justified by faith alone*. In light of Paul’s use of the Samaritans and Sodomites in *Romans* 1 to make his case by way of example, truly we may say that what Ezekiel had prophesied had come true: “thou shalt receive thy sisters, thine elder and thy younger: and I will give them unto thee for daughters” (16:61). Out of those Samaritans and Gentiles, Jesus had cleansed for Himself “a peculiar people” who were not only “zealous of good works” (*Titus* 2:14) but also had been justified apart from them.

**The Jealousy Narrative in Romans 2:17-29**

*The Jealousy Narrative* continues its successful overtures in the second half of the chapter. Paul clearly portrays the Jews as unbelieving and disobedient, after having portraying the Gentiles as believing and obedient. Here the Gentiles are uncircumcised “by nature” (*Romans* 2:27), yet inwardly are the real Jews, for “he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit” (2:29). Paul is again writing of believing Gentiles here: they are regenerated, circumcised in the heart, and indwelt by the Spirit. These are the real, believing Jews, even though they are outwardly Gentiles. The Jews, on the other hand, while circumcised in the flesh, are unbelieving Gentiles at heart, for they rest on their obedience with an unwarranted confidence, shameless in their self-promotion even as they disobey, resting on and boasting in the law even as they are unbelieving lawbreakers:

Behold, thou art called a Jew, and retest in the law, and makest thy boast of God...being instructed out of the law; And art confident...thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal? Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege? Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God?...if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision. (2:17-25)

Because of their disobedience, Paul lays at their feet the charge that “the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you, as it is written,” an unmistakable reference to *Ezekiel* 36:20-23. Here in the second half of *Romans* 2, Paul has done as his Master instructed, continuing His ministry by provoking the Jews to jealousy, portraying them as unbelieving Gentiles, and portraying believing Gentiles as the real Jews. Whereas the chapter started with the Jews judging the Gentiles (2:3), Paul ends the chapter with the Gentiles judging the Jews: “And shall not uncircumcision which is by nature, if it fulfil the law, judge thee, who by the letter and circumcision dost transgress the law?” (2:27).

Thus in *Romans* chapter 2 does Paul bring the full weight of *Ezekiel*’s message to bear on the Jews of his day, just as Jesus had done before him. He shows them that *Ezekiel*’s ancient promise of “a new heart...and a new spirit” followed by repentance and obedience, had been fulfilled in the Gentiles. It is the Gentiles, not the Jews, who have believed and obeyed, showing themselves to be the true sons of Abraham, who truly “do the works of Abraham” (*John* 8:39), but are justified quite apart from those works (*Romans* 3:28). It is these Gentile sons of Abraham who have the Law written in their hearts and the Spirit indwelling, Who causes them to “walk in my statutes, and...keep My judgments, and do them” (*Ezekiel* 36:27).

The scribes, Pharisees, and Levites did their works “to be seen of men” (*Matthew* 23:5) and “justify [themselves] before men” (*Luke* 16:15), and of men they “have their reward” (*Matthew* 6:16). But God’s people are patient in their continuance of good works, and their “praise is not of men, but of God” (*Romans* 2:29), and their “Father, which seeth in secret” rewards them openly (*Matthew* 6:18). Such a dramatic contrast understandably leaves the Jews bewildered in their jealous indignation, as they question the faithfulness (*Romans* 3:3) and righteousness (3:5) of God. As Paul demonstrates in *Romans* 3 and 4, however, both charges are overturned, for the promise “was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith” (4:13), and God “hath set forth [Jesus] to be a propitiation...that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus” (3:25, 26).

What we have seen in *Romans* 2, and particularly in 2:13, is a restatement of *Ezekiel*’s condemnation of the Jews—“for they hear thy words, but they do them not” (*Ezekiel* 33:32)—and Jesus’ condemnation of the Pharisees—“for they say, and do not” (*Matthew* 23:3)—all in the context of *the Jealousy Narrative* in which Israel’s elder and younger sisters are given back to her as daughters. It is these who initially “answered and said, ‘I will not’: but afterward...repented, and went” (*Matthew* 21:29). It is these who are the doers of the law, and not the hearers only. It is these who have a new heart and a new Spirit and are justified by faith alone.

*A Future Justification based on Words and Works?*

Because they did not understand *the Jealousy Narrative*, Lusk, Wright, Shepherd, and Stellman all misunderstood Paul to be speaking in *Romans* of an initial justification that is based on faith, and a final justification based on works. To support this, these men also appeal to a future justification by “words” (*Matthew* 12) and a future justification by works (*Matthew* 25). In both passages, the errant interpretation by Lusk, Wright, Shepherd, and Stellman is plainly corrected by *the Jealousy Narrative*.

**A Future Justification by Words?**

In *Matthew* 12:36-37, Jesus warns the Pharisees: “But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For *by thy words thou shalt be justified*, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.”

As we noted at the beginning of the article, Lusk appeals to this passage when he says that ‘Jesus is not kidding... when he speaks of a future justification according to our words (Mt. 12:37; 25:31ff).’ Stellman, also, finally capitulated to the Roman view of justification due in no small part to his belief that Jesus was teaching a future justification based on words. Shepherd, likewise, made the same case in his

*Thirty-Four Theses* (thesis 4). But a closer reading of *Matthew 12* tells a different story.

John the Baptist was the herald of the Messiah, announcing the arrival of Kingdom of God (*Matthew 3:1-17*). When Jesus heard that John had been imprisoned—a formal rejection of the Kingdom of God by the Jews—He immediately departed and went to “Galilee of the Gentiles” (*Matthew 4:12-17*). It is common, as we shall see, for Jesus to turn to the Gentiles when He and His Kingdom are rejected by His own. This is what is happening in *Matthew 12*. Jesus and His disciples had picked corn on the Sabbath, and the Pharisees criticized them for it (12:2). Then He went into their synagogue, and the Pharisees questioned whether He ought to be healing on the Sabbath (12:10). After He healed a man, “the Pharisees went out, and held a council against him, how they might destroy him” (12:14).

What happened next was simply the working out of *the Jealousy Narrative*. When Jesus knew their thoughts, “he withdrew himself from thence” and turned His attention to the Gentiles “and healed them” that it might be fulfilled, “I will put my spirit upon him, and he shall shew judgment to the Gentiles.... And in his name shall the Gentiles trust” (*Matthew 12:18-21*). The new heart and new spirit of Ezekiel is hereby given to the Gentiles. Then, when Jesus healed a blind, dumb, demon-possessed man, the people were astonished and understood that the Kingdom of God had come: “Is not this the son of David?” (12:23). But the Pharisees criticized Him further, saying, “This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils” (12:24). Jesus explained, rather, “I cast out devils by the Spirit of God” and “the kingdom of God is come unto you” (12:28).

The contrast is strikingly clear: Jesus had come by the Spirit of God, preaching the Kingdom of God, *and the Jews rejected Him*. Jesus then turned to the Gentiles with “My Spirit upon Him,” preaching the Kingdom of God, *and the Gentiles believed in Him*. It is in this context that Jesus introduces “justification by words.” He begins by saying,

All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever *speaketh a word* against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever *speaketh* against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.... A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things. But I say unto you, That every *idle word that men shall speak*, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy *words* thou shalt be justified, and by thy *words* thou shalt be condemned. (*Matthew 12:31, 32, 35-37*)

What have we before us but a contrast between Gentile belief, and Jewish unbelief? The Gentiles expressed their belief with *their words*: “Is this not the son of David?” (*Matthew 12:23*). The Pharisees expressed their unbelief with *their words*: “This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils” (12:24). As Jesus explains in this context, the Gentiles expressed their *belief* from the “good treasure” of their regenerated hearts, while the Pharisees expressed their *unbelief* from the “evil treasure” of their unregenerated hearts. It is by *words* that their belief or unbelief is expressed: “O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh” (12:34). In this context, Jesus says we will give an account for our words “in the day of judgment” (12:36). This, Lusk, Shepherd, and Stellman think, is a reference to a future justification by *works*.

But Jesus then gives two examples of what it will look like to be justified by our words “in the day of judgment,” and His examples serve to correct Lusk, Shepherd, and Stellman. To provoke the Jews, Jesus explained that the *Gentile Ninevites* would rise at the judgment and condemn this present generation because the Ninevites “repented at the preaching of Jonas” (*Matthew 12:41*). And the *Gentile Queen of Sheba* would rise at the judgment and condemn this generation because she was able “to hear the wisdom of Solomon” (12:42). The shaming of the Jews by Gentiles in the Day of Judgment would be strange, were it not for our knowledge of the *Jealousy Narrative*. The Queen of Sheba and the Ninevites—Gentiles all—are justified by their words, and this “adulterous generation,” the Pharisees, is condemned by theirs. That is the contrast we are offered.

Since the context here is “the day of judgment” at which men are either justified or condemned by their words, it would be well to know what, precisely, the Ninevites and the Queen of Sheba *actually said*: “And Jonah...said, ‘Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.’ *So the people of Nineveh believed God*” (*Jonah 3:5*). “*It was a true report* which I heard in mine own land of thine acts, and of thy wisdom: Howbeit I believed not their words, until I came” (*2 Chronicles 9:5-6*).

Since the people of Nineveh proclaimed a fast and turned from their evil ways (*Jonah 3:5-10*), and since the Queen of Sheba loaded Solomon with gifts (*2 Chronicles 9:9*), their examples provided a perfect opportunity for Jesus to say these Gentiles would be *justified by their works* in the day of judgment. But He did not. Instead, He said they would be justified *by their words*, and said their words were just an overflow of what was in their hearts: “we believe God!” and “It was a true report!” But the words of the Pharisees were “we do not believe!” and “we must destroy him!” Works are not in view here—only words of belief and words of unbelief.

The Pharisees finally asked for a sign that they, too, might believe, but the only sign they would receive is the sign of the Resurrection (*Matthew 12:38-40*). Thus, Jesus reveals here what He ultimately would reveal to Paul—namely that faith is trust in God that springs from the overflow of the heart, and is expressed with our *words*: “That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation” (*Romans 10:9-10*).

Applied to the Queen of Sheba and the Ninevites, they believed with their hearts unto righteousness and confessed with their mouths unto salvation. Not so for the Pharisees. To complete the *Jealousy Narrative*, Jesus explained that while the demon-possessed Gentile had been freed from his bondage, the final condition of these Pharisees would be seven times worse than that man’s original condition. “Even so shall it be also unto this wicked generation” (*Matthew 12:45*).

And what can we say of Lusk, Shepherd, and Stelman? Only that they stopped reading at “by thy words thou shalt be justified” (*Matthew 12:37*) and skipped forward to “whosoever shall do the will of my Father” (12:50), and concluded that Jesus had our works in mind for justification at the last day. Had they paused to reflect on why and how Jesus was making the Jews jealous, they would have seen that when we rise at the judgment, like the Queen of Sheba and the repentant Ninevites, we remain justified at the last day as we always have been—by faith alone. But more than this, Jesus has shown us here that the righteousness we possess at the Last Judgment *is the same righteousness by which we were justified at our conversion*. In both examples Jesus appeals to that righteousness which the Ninevites and the Queen of Sheba possessed by faith when they first heard and believed the wisdom of Solomon and the preaching of Jonah. For “with the heart man believeth unto righteousness,” and “faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (*Romans 10:10, 17*).

#### **A Future Justification by Works?**

Lusk, Wright, Shepherd, and Stelman also appeal to *Matthew 25:31-46*, to prove a future justification based on works.

When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory.... Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty.... (*Matthew 25:31ff*)

This, they say, is evidence of a final justification based on our personal righteousness. However, upon closer examination, we see the *Jealousy Narrative* being applied by the Lord even at the final judgment scene. This becomes evident when we see the series of parables and encounters leading up to *Matthew 25*. Leading up to His narrative on the final Judgment, Jesus has relentlessly testified of the unfruitfulness of the Jews, and gave advance warning that the Kingdom was about to be taken away from them, *because they do not obey the Law, but are hearers only*:

*Matthew 21:28-32*, the parable of the “two sons” contrasting the faith and obedience of the publicans and the harlots with the unbelief and disobedience of the scribes and the chief priests.

*Matthew 21:33-46*, the parable of the householder, in which the Kingdom of God is taken from the Jews and given to the Gentiles, who are those “other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons...a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.”

*Matthew 22:1-14*, the parable of the wedding banquet, in which the original invitees “made light of it,” so the feast is given instead to the heathen, “both bad and good.”

*Matthew 23:1-39*, in which Jesus condemns the disobedience of the scribes and Pharisees, yet commends their teachings to his disciples and the multitudes. As Ezekiel had said and as Paul would one day echo, the scribes and Pharisees, “say, and do not” (23:3).

*Matthew 24:1-51*, in which Jesus foretells the final rejection of the Jewish nation. Here He returns to the parable of the householder (21:33-46), saying, “Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household...whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing” (24:45-46). Because it is the scribes and Pharisees who “say, and do not,” it is clear that the “faithful and wise servant” refers to the Gentiles.

*Matthew 25:1-13*, in which the foolish virgins look with jealousy upon the oil and lamps of the wise virgins. In this context, the foolish virgins are Israel, and the wise virgins are Gentiles.

*Matthew 25:14-30*, in which the talent is taken from the “wicked and slothful...unprofitable servant” and given to the “good and faithful servant.” This again is an application of the *Jealousy Narrative* in which the unprofitable servant is Israel and the good and faithful servant signifies the Gentiles.

This unrelenting application of the *Jealousy Narrative* is the context of *Matthew 25:31-46*, and we see the Judgment scene here not as a sidebar to *the Narrative*, but as a continuation of it. The final humiliation of the Jews on

Judgment Day is that the believing Gentiles were more obedient than the unbelieving Jews. The final humiliation of the Jews on Judgment Day is that the believing Gentiles were more obedient than the unbelieving Jews. That *the Jealousy Narrative* is carried all the way to the end should not surprise us. The fire of God's jealousy, after all "shall burn unto the lowest hell" (*Deuteronomy* 32:22).

This scene of judgment is typically misread in isolation as if Jesus was planning to separate people on Judgment Day based on works—as if Jesus had said, "And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another *based on their works*." But Jesus says no such thing. He says, rather, that He will separate them based on whether they are sheep or goats—sheep *believe* and goats *do not believe*: "But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep" (*John* 10:26). The believing sheep are therefore separated from unbelieving goats before the first "good work" or "bad work" is ever mentioned—which is to say that on Judgment Day, Jesus will separate sheep from goats *based on a righteousness that is by faith apart from works*. Then, just as the scribes and Pharisees were to be shamed and humiliated on the last day *based on the faith* of the Gentiles (*Matthew* 12), they are also to be humiliated on the last by *based on the obedience* of the Gentiles (*Matthew* 25). In the context of the *Jealousy Narrative*, Jesus is recounting the fruitful obedience of the Gentiles before the Jews, but not until He first separates them based on faith. This is consistent with the message throughout Scripture—that God's name will be sanctified before the nations based on His people's *obedience*, but His people will be justified before God based on a *righteousness that comes by faith alone, apart from works of the Law*. As Paul said, "Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace" (*Romans* 4:16). Justification of necessity must be by faith apart from works, so that it might be by grace. But God's name is sanctified before the heathen based on the works that spring from a new heart and a new spirit: "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: ... and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them" (*Ezekiel* 36:26-27).

Notably, "the righteous" sheep have done "the things contained in the law" (*Romans* 2:14), but they eschew the shameless self-promotion of the Pharisees to the very end: "Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?" (*Matthew* 25:37-39). Those are not the questions that are asked by people who have been taught, or who have believed, a "gospel" of justification by works.

*Matthew* 12 and 25 are typically interpreted apart from the context of *the Jealousy Narrative* and instead are read in a Roman Catholic context—as if Jesus was formally confirming a final justification by meritorious works and

words—and Lusk, Wright, Shepherd, and Stellman all read it that way. But Jesus is actually highlighting the faith and obedience of the Gentiles as a continuation of His Father's *Jealousy Narrative*—something Paul imitates meticulously when he begins and ends is *Epistle to the Romans* with the faith (1:8) and the obedience (16:19) of the Gentiles. In that context, *Matthew* 12 and 25 speak clearly of a justification that is *apart from works*. In Jason Stellman's conversion testimony at the *Coming Home Network*, he explained how he had arrived at the Roman Catholic gospel of justification by works: "And so I thought, 'I need to go back to Paul, but I also need to go back to Jesus, too. I need to start looking at the way Jesus speaks about judgment, sin, the relationship of faith and works, and what happens at the last day.'"<sup>2</sup> Indeed he does. Lusk, Wright, and Shepherd would do well to do the same.

### *Conclusion*

We understand that the interpretation of *Romans* 2:13 that we have put forth in this monograph may be difficult to adopt, especially in view of a prevailing Evangelical conviction that Paul is speaking hypothetically of "doers of the Law" being justified *by the law*. Even Calvin's understanding of *Romans* 2:13 was that Paul was speaking hypothetically here, as if to convey the impossibility of the obeying the law for justification.<sup>3</sup> However, there is no need to take Paul hypothetically when he says the Gentiles do "the things contained in the law" (*Romans* 2:14) and "keep the righteousness of the law" (2:26). The *Jealousy Narrative* provides a context in which such statements are seen as the fulfillment of *Ezekiel* 36:27, "and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them." The Gentiles have neither the Law "by nature" (*Romans* 2:14), nor are circumcised "by nature" (2:27), yet they have been given both signs of the covenant, for these are in reference to the new heart and new spirit by which God's people believe unto justification, and being justified by faith alone, begin to obey the Law far better than any unregenerate scribe or Pharisee could ever hope to do. Here, Augustine corrects Calvin, and supports this interpretation:

Now he could not mean to contradict himself in saying, "The doers of the law shall be justified," as if their justification came through their works, and not through grace; since he declares that a man is justified freely by His grace without the works of the law, intending by the term "freely" nothing else than that works do not precede justification.... (*Treatise on the Spirit and the Letter*, 45)

---

<sup>2</sup> EWTN, (45:20 – 46:00).

<sup>3</sup> "Still more, we can prove from this passage that no one is justified by works; for if they alone are justified by the law who fulfill the law, it follows that no one is justified; for no one can be found who can boast of having fulfilled the law" (Calvin, *Commentary on Romans*, CCEL).

In light of Jesus' use of Gentiles, Samaritans, harlots, publicans, and yes, even a Roman centurion, as models of both faith and obedience to the law *vis-à-vis* the unbelief and disobedience of the scribes, chief priests, and Pharisees, we need only understand that Paul was applying the *Jealousy Narrative* to show—as Jesus did with Naaman the Syrian, the widow of Sidon, the Queen of Sheba, and the Ninevites—that the wicked Gentiles of *Romans 1* were receiving the gracious gift of “a new heart” and “a new spirit,” (*Ezekiel 36:26*) and with that gift came the promise of Spirit-led obedience of the people of God: “I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes” (*36:27*).

We note as well that historically, *Romans 2:15* has been taken to mean that God puts His Law in the hearts of all mankind, and even Calvin reads this to mean that God has “imprinted on their hearts a discrimination and judgment by which they distinguish between what is just and unjust.”<sup>4</sup> However, there is no cause for such a reading, especially since it is *creation*, not the Law written in the heart, that serves this purpose for the unregenerate (*Romans 1:19-20*). The writing of the Law on the heart is not something that God bestows promiscuously upon all mankind, but rather to His special people, alone. Because God promises the writing of the law on the hearts of His people (*i.e.*, “I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people” – *Jeremiah 31:33*; compare *2 Corinthians 3:3*, *Hebrews 10:15, 16*), it makes little sense for Paul to say that God puts His Law in the hearts of all mankind in order to elicit Jewish jealousy. The writing of the Law in the heart is a *covenant promise* to “My people” alone, which is precisely why *Romans 2:15* necessarily incites the Jews to jealousy. We believe that Calvin again is corrected by Augustine here, when he says of this passage in *Romans*,

such Gentiles as have the law written in their hearts belong to the gospel, since to them, on their believing, it is the power of God unto salvation.... Now what the apostle attributed to Gentiles of this character,—how that “they have the work of the law written in their hearts” [*Romans 2:15*]; must be some such thing as what he says to the Corinthians: “not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart” [*2 Corinthians 3:3*]. (*Treatise on the Spirit and the Letter*, 44, 46)

In this context, when Paul says, “For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified” (*Romans 2:13*), the *Jealousy Narrative* helps us understand his meaning. His consistent message in *Romans 2* is that the uncircumcised Gentiles and Samaritans portrayed in *Romans 1* had received and believed the Gospel, had repented, and were now walking in

righteousness, and doing “the things contained in the law” (*2:14*) and keeping “the righteousness of the law” (*2:26*), but the unrepentant Jews “obey unrighteousness” (*2:8*) and are “breaking the law” (*2:23*). By appealing to *Ezekiel 16* as the foundation of *Romans 2*, and showing that the prophecy of *Ezekiel 16* is now an accomplished fact, Paul is essentially saying, “For not unbelieving Israel is just before God, but her believing Sisters are,” for this is the essence of the *Jealousy Narrative*. When Paul explains this to the Corinthians, he describes people of Corinth as if he was writing to the Gentiles and Samaritans of *Romans 1*: “fornicators...idolaters...adulterers...effeminate...abusers of themselves with mankind...thieves...covetous...drunkards...revilers...extortioners...shall not inherit the kingdom of God.... And such were some of you” (*1 Corinthians 6:9-11*; see also *Ephesians 5:3-8*). Yet these repentant Gentiles and Sodomites were now walking in the righteousness of the law, having been justified by faith alone: “but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God” (*1 Corinthians 6:11*). They were not justified by their good works, but “works” are what justified Gentiles *do*.

Just as the *Jealousy Narrative* spurns any notions of law righteousness in *Romans 2*, it also prohibits any notions of law righteousness in *Matthew 12* or *25*. We see in *Luke 11:31-32* that obedient Gentiles rise to judge the disobedient Jews, and we also see them do so in *Romans 2:27*. This theme of obedient Gentiles rising in judgment of disobedient Jews “in the day of judgment” is a product of the *Jealousy Narrative* in which Gentile faith and obedience is contrasted with Jewish unbelief and disobedience, even up to the Day of Judgment. Therefore, Jesus' Gentiles in *Matthew 12:41-42* rise to judge the unbelieving Jews “in the day of judgment,” yet are justified not by their works but “by their words” which were the overflow of the faith that came from the heart upon their first hearing of the gospel (*Matthew 12:34, 37*; *Romans 10:10*). Just so, the sheep of *Matthew 25* are separated from the goats based on a righteousness apart from works of the Law before any good work is mentioned. Only then is their obedience acknowledged before the goats, consistent with Jesus' constant theme of Gentiles who possess a faith greater than any He had found in Israel, and would therefore dine with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the children of the kingdom would be cast out into outer darkness. We therefore insist with Paul that God's “peculiar people” are “zealous of good works” (*Titus 2:14*), but we also insist with Moses, Ezekiel, Jesus, Paul, and all of Scripture, that God's peculiar people are justified by faith alone, “apart from the works of the law” (*Romans 3:28*).

<sup>4</sup> Calvin, *Commentary on Romans 2:15*.