

Aquila opened the door. There, standing in the street, was one of the strangest beings he'd ever seen. "Aquila?" "Yes?" "I'll make this as brief as possible. Almighty God has decreed that all men of all the ages are to be gathered together in a vast arena, there to stand trial before God."

"Judge: The purpose of this trial of humanity is to determine each person standing before God. All the Jews of all time will be there. All Gentiles who have ever lived will be there. Everyone will be tried. *Individually.*"

The strange-looking man then motioned to Aquila to follow him. Aquila stepped out into the street, walked only a short distance, and was suddenly greeted by a vast coliseum large enough to hold the population of the world. A restrained, almost aloof figure mounted the judge's bench. Glancing past the crowd, he grasped a gavel and sat down.

"Order," came the stern voice. "The Gentiles have selected a group of five men to represent them. These five, in turn, have selected their spokesman. This man is to defend the Gentiles."

"Judge: You understand that but one of you will speak for the defense. The other four are to serve as his counsel. The Jews, likewise, have selected five representatives from among them. They, in turn, had selected one spokesman. Warriors for the defense, please rise and identify yourself." "I am Raspusen. I will defend the Jews." "I am Diogenes. I will defend the Gentiles." There was a pause. The judge now fixed his eyes firmly upon another man sitting at a table alone. "Would the prosecuting attorney identify himself, please?"

"I am Paul of Tarsus."

"It will be your responsibility, Paul, to present before all those people gathered here evidence which you see establishes either the guilt and condemnation of each person as they stand before God, or evidence that establishes proof they are found in right standing within the eyes of God. Do you understand the enormity of your task, Paul? The entire human race is on trial here today. It is your responsibility to present evidence to this court. Your evidence will very well decide whether men or women here will be found guilty and condemned, or accepted as right in the eyes of God. This court wishes to be understood, and wishes each one of you to know you may or may not be found guilty, but it will be individual."

"And do you, Raspusen and Diogenes, understand you are to defend your people, the Jews and the Gentiles respectively, seeking to establish a standard by which each of you is to be judged?" The judge reached for his gavel again. "In order for the Most High God, our Lord, that He has declared that this day be set aside for all mankind to be placed on trial, you have been chosen to be those of the defense. Today, it will be determined in this great arena who is right in the eyes of God. "There was a long silence. "Shall we proceed?" queried the judge, glancing first at Raspusen, then Diogenes, and lastly at Paul.

"Yes," replied three voices as one. "Let us proceed."

Paul had no comprehension of the number of people he now faced, but he could clearly see an ocean of heathen Gentiles to his left. To his right was a far smaller number of the people of his own race—the Hebrews. The arena itself was a vast, ruthless courtroom, and in front of Paul was the judge's bench. To his left sat Diogenes and his four cohorts. Just to his right, at another table, sat Raspusen and his four counselors. Paul stood, respectfully, nodding to Diogenes, who was dressed in a white robe—the garb of a Greek philosopher. Around his neck hung a large gold medallion.

Raspusen—now there was a different matter. An arrogant man, as arrogant as one might imagine. Tall, bony, sober-faced, and seemingly contemptuous of the entire human race, Raspusen sat solemn and erect at his table, robed in the garb of a Pharisee. "Raspusen Ben Phineas," Paul muttered to himself. "The Raspusen Ben Phineas."

The judge was more enigmatic than either of the defending attorneys. Who he was, no one was for sure, and no one was about to ask. It was enough that the eternal God had appointed this man to represent the Creator of heaven and earth in hearing this case. Nonetheless, Paul could not help thinking, "That man looks just exactly what I would imagine Moses to look like." One thing was certain—in the hearts of everyone present, this judge would be fair, but he would be dispassionate.

"Your Honor," initiated Paul, "if it pleases the court, I would like to have a moment to confer with Diogenes and Raspusen." "So be it," replied the judge. After a few moments of exchanged whispers among the three men, Paul stood to address the judge once more.

"Your Honor, all who are present here today wish to know the standards by which they are to be judged. In conferring with Diogenes and Raspusen just now concerning this matter, the Jews have requested that they be judged by the Jewish law—that is, they wish to be judged by the law handed down to them by their Lord, that very law which the Jews have dedicated themselves to obey. The Gentiles, in turn, have asked that they be judged by their good deeds and their evil deeds." The judge responded in four succinct words that thundered throughout the arena and resonated with finality:

"So shall it be."

"Your Honor, everyone in this great arena needs to be made aware of just what this means. May I explain to the gathered throng?" said Paul.

"You may."

"Thank you, Your Honor. I will speak first to the Jews. If a Jew has been found to be completely faithful and having obeyed the law, then he will be found to be in right standing with God. He will then receive from God a reward for having obeyed that law."

"If a Gentile has been found to have lived a totally good life—having done good deeds and accomplished good works—and if those good deeds outweigh his evil deeds, then Almighty God will judge that Gentile to have right standing in the eyes of God. The Gentiles, too, will receive a reward from God." Paul paused.

"But if it has been found that any Jew has not obeyed the law in its entirety, he will be found to be not in right standing with God, and as a result, he will face wrath and anger, trouble and distress. As to the Gentiles, if any Gentile has done more evil deeds than he has done good deeds, then he will be found as one not right with God. That Gentile will likewise face wrath, anger, trouble, and distress. I point out to this court and all who are on trial that these are the very standards which the Jews themselves have selected as the measure that God will employ to...establish judgment."

"The Gentiles have also decided by what standard they are to be judged. This is not God's choice, but the Gentiles' choice. This is their choice of how they wish God to judge them. Those on trial have selected the standard about which they are to be tried. And let me point out on this inevitable day when all men must stand before God, that it will be the Jew—the Jew who will be judged first—and then the Gentile." The Jews, as one, nodded in agreement with Paul's words.

"Rasbussin," Paul cleared his throat, "the Jews claim that they have an approach that makes them right with God. Now the heathen claim they have a plan that makes them right with God. Are either correct? Are perhaps both? Are perhaps neither? This one thing is certain: right standing with God comes first to the Jew, then the Gentile. Yet, despite that fact, that inevitable principle, Your Honor, with your permission, I believe it would be proper to begin to speak first to the Gentiles." He turned to Diogenes, the spokesman for the Gentiles.

"Diogenes, could you enlarge upon your view of how the Gentiles can be right with God?" Paul was looking at a regally dressed man who bore the marks of scholarship and intellect in all of its bearing. Yet anyone meeting Diogenes would probably think of him as a very understanding and gentle man. Diogenes stood. "We, the Gentiles, are good people. We, those who are called the nations, live good lives. We choose that. And we believe that it is God's desire that we be judged by our deeds—good and evil. Deeds that are good. Deeds that are evil."

Paul quickly responded. "Then if someone were to ask you, 'How am I to be in right standing with God, Diogenes?' what would be your answer?" Diogenes' response was lightning fast. "Live a good life. You'll be right with God. Live a bad life and you will face the wrath of God. Doesn't everyone know that?"

"Not everyone," came an arrogant-sounding voice. Paul turned in surprise. The voice was that of Raspusen. With eyes flashing, right arm extended, forefinger pointing straight at Diogenes, Raspusen continued: "You will be judged by God according to your knowledge and your obedience to the law of God." Everyone across the vast throng began whispering.

There came a low rumble of protestation from the Gentiles. A heavy-sounding thud brought the throng to silence as the judge slammed his gavel hard against his desk. "Raspusen, you will restrain yourself. I will have order in my courtroom."

Paul walked almost nonchalantly over to the Gentile side. "Diogenes, what is your response to Raspusen's charge? Will you be judged according to your knowledge and obedience of Jewish law?" Diogenes turned to face the judge. "Your Honor," said Diogenes, "we plead innocent to this charge made by Raspusen. We are innocent of the law, and we base that plea on the basis of ignorance. We, Gentiles, are wholly ignorant of their law." Diogenes turned again and looked straight at Raspusen.

"We've never heard of your law. You never came to us, Gentiles, and told us anything about your law. Most of you Jews have never even left your own country. And when you do, you form the wrong clave so that you will stay clear of us unclean Gentiles—too unclean to even be touched. Just how, Raspusen, would you think we would ever hear anything about you and your precious law?" Again, a low rumbling of assent swept across the Gentiles. Paul raised his hand as a signal for silence.

"Your Honor, if I understand what Diogenes has just said, the position of the heathen is that they believe they should live a good life, do good deeds, wholly apart from the Jewish law. The heathen do not believe they should be indicted, tried, or convicted on the basis of the law because they're ignorant of the law. Now, Diogenes, have I stated your view correctly?"

Diogenes nodded a satisfied yes and added, "You have spoken correctly, Paul." At that, Paul quickly stepped up to Diogenes, their noses almost touching. "Diogenes, sir. Where exactly are you from?"

"Greece?" answered Diogenes, a little confused. "Ah, Greece!" retorted Paul. "Where in Greece?" Diogenes flushed. "Oh, well, I am from Athens."

"You're from Athens?" thundered Paul. "Judge! Athens, Diogenes? The philosophical, intellectual center of the whole world? You would dare walk into this courtroom, Diogenes—a Greek and an Athenian—and have the gall to tell this court you have a defense based on ignorance? The greatest boast you Greeks have, one you make wherever you go, is that you have unlimited, all-encompassing knowledge of absolutely everything. Ignorance? Ignorance?! You, a Greek, a man of Athens, a philosopher, an intellect, a scholar, are going to come here into this court and tell us that you do not know the law? And that you plead ignorance?" Paul stepped back to the center of the room, slowly turning in a full circle so that his words would be heard by every ear in the arena.

"God's wrath has been, and is being, revealed. He reveals His wrath to wicked men who suppress the truth." Paul turned and glared at Diogenes. "And Diogenes, the truth is this: you have suppressed the truth by your wickedness. You cannot say you do not know the truth about God. God has made His truth very plain to all Gentiles, of all ages, everywhere.

Ever since the creation of the world, the living God has made plain—for you to see His divine nature and His eternal power and His invisible qualities."

And now Paul roared: "You have understood, Diogenes! You do know! Sir, you're without excuse!" With that, the Jews began to laugh. Some roared. Some jumped to their feet. Others began kicking the floor in derision. They knew that Paul had hit a telling point. They knew they had a friend in Paul—but they did not realize, for they had forgotten, that they did not have a friend in the judge. Unconsciously, the judge rose to his feet, and in a most unbecoming way, he began to cry:

"Order!"

Paul continued. "Diogenes, you Gentile heathens have known the true God all along; you simply have refused to acknowledge Him as God. Yet you never gave thanks to Him whom you knew. Your so-called intellectualism, your ability to reason and to present all things logically, has evolved into a futility of nothing but high-sounding, meaningless words. Your hearts became foolish. All your vaunted intellect became filled with darkness. So also, your hearts, Diogenes. You Greeks claim to be wise. Well, is this wisdom? Is this wisdom, Diogenes—to give up the glory of the immortal God and exchange that glory for idols? To exchange the glory of God for stone figures chiseled out of rock, statues which look like men, and birds, and reptiles, and bugs? Do you call that wisdom, Diogenes?"

Paul lifted his face and stared at those seated in the vast arena, then called out to his left. "You Gentiles walked into this courtroom pleading ignorance, but you knew God. You saw the Lord of creation. You saw Him in His creation, but you turned away from what you saw. You turned so far away from Him that your mind became a study in the ridiculous. You began to worship statues of animals and of men, instead of considering the God whom you knew was there.

Well, here. Here is the consequence of your folly. God gave up on you. God simply turned you loose to let you taste all the desires that were in your sinful hearts. And what was in your hearts? Sexual impurity. That's what was in your hearts, and you degraded your bodies with one another. You exchanged the truth of God for a lie. You even began serving creatures—creatures which God created—instead of worshiping the Creator of those creatures. This, you wise ones, is pure insanity.

I repeat: God gave you up, Gentiles. You did all sorts of things that were simply sinful lust, and then you justified what you did with great feats of intellectual gymnastics. Your men stopped having sex with women. You began having sex with one another. You became perverted, and your bodies drew the penalty and the consequences of your actions. Diogenes, you had knowledge of God. Gentiles, hear me. You knew. You knew. Yet you decided that you knew something that was really not worth knowing. So, God gave up on you. And He gave you over to a mind which was not intellectual at all, but a mind that was depraved. Hear me, heathen!"

Paul's voice now rang out clear across the coliseum. "Every one of you is filled with every kind of weakness, every kind of evil, every kind of greed and malice. Your thoughts are soaked in envy, deceit, spite, and yes, even murder. You heathen are gossips and slanderers. You are arrogant, and you are God-haters. Furthermore, you are inventors. You invent new ways to do evil. And beyond all that, if that is not enough, you even disobey your parents. Heathen!"

With that, Paul slammed his fist down on the table. "You have no respect for honor. There is no mercy in you. Many of you have lost your natural affections. Furthermore, you knew that God said that if you did these things, you must die. That did not matter to you one iota. You continued to live in degraded immorality, and then you even applauded those who did these things with you. You cheered when you saw that you had influenced others to be as depraved as you are. You cheered." With these words, the Jewish side of the court broke out in wild applause. Raspusen jumped to his feet, clapping his hands over his head. The Jews, as one, roared their approval. Paul lowered his head slightly. No one heard him as he whispered, "Yes, just exactly as I expected you to do, Raspusen. You Hebrews have fallen right into my trap."

Paul raised his hand to request silence. "Your Honor, if it pleases the court, I would like to bring the first indictment." With these words, the Jews, anxious to hear the indictment against the Gentiles, leaned forward expectantly. "Your Honor, with this evidence, I would like to indict—" Paul paused. He filled his lungs with air, whirled around, pointed at the Jews, and veritably roared at them, "Your Honor, with this evidence, I now indict...the Jews!"

For a moment, there was stunned silence. No one moved. Then suddenly the Jews were on their feet. Raspusen, his fist swinging over his head, was screaming, "Jews! How dare you! What does he mean?" The judge rapped furiously for order. Paul gleefully walked over to the side of the Jews. "Oh yes, Raspusen, yes, by all means—yes. By your very mouth, Raspusen, you announced that you agreed with God's own words. Judgment comes first to the Jews. Only after judgment has fallen on the Jews does judgment come unto the heathen."

Paul turned to the judge again. "The Jews are the first to be indicted, Your Honor."

Raspusen roared, "Your Honor, Paul is out of order! He accused the Gentiles but indicted the Jews. Why, Your Honor, why? We demand to know why! These charges, which Paul made, were toward Gentiles. The conduct he described was the conduct of those unclean, uncircumcised infidels over there!" The judge's only reply was to motion for Paul to continue. Paul calmly walked to the center of the room. His response came in quiet and unhurried words.

"Ah, Your Honor. Gentiles, Jews—all of you—please listen. Everything that I have just described, all the evil, all the wickedness, all the perversion, all the sin that you Gentiles have done—every act which you have committed—" Paul stopped, then slowly turned to face the Jews. "Every evil act the Gentiles have committed, you Jews have also committed.

You Jews—you have done everything the Gentiles have done." With that, pandemonium broke out. The Gentiles roared their approval as they moved as one to their feet, thrusting out their fingers and crying as they did to the Jews—a living sea of millions of uncircumcised Gentiles crying in unison: "Yes! Yes! Yes!" Then the chant changed to: "It is true! It is true! It is true!"

The judge wildly banged his gavel. Slowly, the crowd silenced. Nonetheless, here and there, a clear voice could be heard crying out to the other side: "I have seen the Jews do this very thing. I've done these things with the Jews...." One Gentile woman jumped to her feet and cried, "It was a Jew who taught me to do these very evils." Four counselors of the Gentiles jumped to their feet. "Yes, we do these things. We admit it. You Jews do them too. But you do them in hiding. Then you swear you've never done them, nor will you ever, ever admit one of your sins." The whole of the Gentile throng again picked up the chant, "It is true! It is true! It is true!"

The Jews rose to their feet, screaming, "No! No! No, it is not true! We have never done these things." Several minutes of chaos reigned before the judge was able to bring the room back to order. Furiously, he motioned for Paul to continue. Again, Paul walked directly over to where Raspusen was. "Raspusen, there is a holy name, the holiest name of all, the very name of God, specifically the name of the God of the Jews." Paul looks back to the Gentiles. "You Gentiles blaspheme that name, do you not? All over the world, you blaspheme that holy, holy name. Why, Raspusen? Raspusen, why did the Gentiles go out of their way to blaspheme the holy name of the God of the Jews?"

There was no response. "Raspusen, I will tell you why. It is because of the conduct of the Jews. The heathen blasphemed the name of the God of the Hebrews because of the way the Hebrews live."

"No, no," intoned Raspusen. The Jewish section took up his response. "No!" But the Gentiles were in no mood to let that answer pass. "Yes, yes, it is true, yes, yes, it is true!" And then they began to cry out, "We blaspheme the name of God because of you!" Once more, individual Gentiles began to rise to their feet and speak. Accusations filled the air.

"It was a Jew who taught me to sin. It was a Jew who taught me to steal. It was a Jew who taught me to swindle. It was a Jew who caused me to be immoral."

The Jews began shouting back their denial. "No, no, no, it is not true!" Once more, the judge fought for order. "Paul, continue your indictment. And I warn the accused to remain silent now." Paul rested the palms of his hands on Raspusen's desk and leaned forward. He spoke as one who had already issued the Final Judgment. "You who are Jews condemn the Gentiles for their conduct. You pass judgment on them. Yet you do the same things. It's that simple. Your Honor, the indictment stands." There was a pause, then Paul spoke again. "Raspusen?"

It was obvious to all that Paul was about to make this indictment very personal.

"Raspusen. Everyone in this room knows that God's judgment is against those who do those things that both the Jews and the Gentiles do. Raspusen, you are a mere man, yet you have dared to pass judgment against the sins of the Gentiles in matters in which you are just guilty. Do you really think that you, by some mysterious means, could escape God's judgment? Raspusen, you have robed yourself in the law, and in so doing, you state that judgment will not fall on you. Yet you do the very things for which you expect God to condemn the Gentiles."

"Here's what you're saying: Lord, judge the Gentiles. I do the same thing they do, but don't judge me." Your attitude shows your contempt for the riches of God's kindness, Raspusen. Your tolerance for sin is not tolerated by God. God's tolerance and God's patience with you have been tested. God's kindness and patience with you was not supposed to make you arrogant, cold, and judgmental. Raspusen, it was meant to lead you to repentance. You judged the Gentiles while you wrapped yourself in the law. Yet in secret, Raspusen, you were at the same time breaking the law. Do you realize just how patient God's been with you, Raspusen? He waited on you. He felt enormous wrath toward you, but he waited for you to repent. He took all that wrath and stored it away. Again and again, he laid mercy out in front of you, and all the while, he continued to store away his wrath, hoping you would return to him. But you never returned to him. And all the while he waited, and yet you turned *not* to him. Mercy has been offered to you, Raspusen, day after day. And you do not claim that mercy. So much of his wrath has now been stored up. That is, the storehouses are now full.

Simultaneously, Paul raised both arms toward the entire Jewish family. His voice rang clear. "You are stubborn. You are unrepentant. Your hearts are hard. Now God's stored wrath is about to be unleashed. Mercy came first to the Jews. Now, to whom do you think his wrath will come to first? This day his wrath and his judgment are revealed first to the Jews, then to the Gentiles." Paul walked over to the center of the room, opened both arms wide to show that he had encompassed everyone in the stadium. "All of you here have agreed on one thing: Your righteousness with God will be decided on the basis of what you have done. The question is not, 'Do you have righteousness?' Oh, you do. All of you have righteousness. The question is this: Is your righteousness acceptable to God?

I repeat that: According to the very words of the men who represent you, righteousness with God will be established on the basis of what you have done and not done. If you have persisted in doing good, and if you seek glory and if you seek honor and immortality, then the Lord God will give you eternal life. But if you have gone after self-seeking, if you have refused the truth, and if you have followed evil, then what's going to happen? There will be wrath for you, anger for you, trouble for you, and distress for you. All who are not found in right standing with God face wrath, anger, trouble, and distress. Eternal life awaits each of you, wrath and distress. Does the evil in your life outweigh the good in your life? Or does the good outweigh the evil?" Paul now thundered again. "I remind you, these are the very standards you have set for yourself. And even now, the answer is about to be revealed to all of you. For God is totally impartial. If you are a Jew, you are the first to be rewarded. If you

are a Jew, you are the first to receive wrath. Then the Gentiles. The one thing is certain: each of you will receive from God, each according to your obedience to the law and each according to your works. I pause now to ask, what is it that has been established here today? We have clearly seen why the Jews have been indicted. If a man sins under the law, he is judged by that law. The Hebrews gathered here today are judged by the law. But let us be very clear that in God's sight, it is not a Jew who hears the law or knows the law who will be reckoned as having right standing with God. Rather, it is that Jew who has obeyed the law who will be declared right with God.

And now, Your Honor, if it please the court, I would like to present the second indictment."

With no more than the motion of a hand, the judge signaled Paul to continue. "What of the heathen? What of those whom the Jews call the nations? Their stand before God is also clear. If a man sins apart from the knowledge of the law, then he perishes outside the knowledge of the law." Raspusen leaned forward, eyes glaring. He wanted everyone to know he had nothing but contempt for everything Paul was saying. Paul, catching Raspusen's eye, stared back and then smiled. Never has a man oozed so much arrogance and confidence, thought Paul. "Raspusen, you are absolutely certain you have obeyed all the law, do you not? You're sure that you will be found right with God even if no one else is."

'Raspusen, I've never seen anyone as arrogant as you,' mused Paul to himself. Paul, it seems, was developing an intense dislike for this man. But he was also pitying him. Then Paul continued, "It is the man who has obeyed the law who will be declared right with God. Is that right? A man who has obeyed the law, that is the man whom God will call righteous. Is that not right?" Paul turned again to the Gentiles. "Ah, but the Gentiles. You say you do not know the law, but please observe that you instinctively do the things which are required by the law. You yourselves are your own private law. In some immutable, innate way, the law itself is inside of you, yes, and you instinctively know this unwritten law. Furthermore, your very lives demonstrate outwardly the operation of law that is working within you.

Gentiles, you may not have known the word 'law,' but you know the effects of the law in your hearts. You watch what has happened even in your own bodies when you have broken with your conscience. And whatever your conscience has told you about right and wrong, you've seen what has happened when you've done right or wrong. Even at this moment, your conscience witnesses against you that you know an act to be evil when you do it. You know when you were doing good. You knew when you were doing evil. Even now, at this very moment, the Lord is revealing your heart. God reads your motives. He reads your conscience. When He determines whether you have done good or not, He knows whether you have done evil or not. And today He acts upon the knowledge, for He has read your heart."

Now Paul whirled about on his heels, faced with Raspusen head-on again. "The Lord God opened the hearts of every one of you, yes, even you Hebrews. He will discover how your conscience spoke to you when you disobeyed the law. The Lord will let it be known and

reveal to everyone here just how righteous your heart has really been. Your Honor, the Gentiles knew. Even as I speak, every Gentile in this vast throng is being accused by his thoughts and by the conscience within him. The heathen have no defense. Your Honor, the Gentiles knew just as the Jews knew. Both heathen and Jew have no defense. Your Honor, here is the indictment that I wish to lay against the heathen. Every Gentile has a conscience. His conscience deep within him declares that he knows what he ought to do, and he did not do it."

The judge was about to respond to Paul when Raspusen jumped to his feet. Raspusen was outraged. "Paul, you're mad! Look at those heathen. They're unclean, uncircumcised. Do you hear me? Uncircumcised? How dare you classify me on the same level with these pagan infidels? I am a circumcised son of Abraham. And that is not all. God sees my circumcision."

Raspusen was about to say more when Paul took one step toward him and thrust his finger almost in his face. "Raspusen, you're very proud of your law, are you?" Raspusen started to continue, but Paul took one step toward him and thrust his finger almost into his face, and said, "You're very proud of your law, are you not, Raspusen? And you're proud of your circumcision? You brag about your relationship with God. You know him well, you say. You're superior because you, Raspusen, have been instructed by the law. You're absolutely convinced that you're ordained to be a guide to the blind, you Raspusen. See yourself as a light for those who are in darkness. You, Raspusen, are an instructor for the foolish. You, Raspusen, are a teacher for the immature, the model of all propriety."

The sarcasm in Paul's voice was growing with every word. "And why are you so wonderful, Raspusen? I will tell you why. Because you have a form of knowledge and a form of truth. Well, Raspusen, if you are so prepared to teach others, if you're so eager to instruct them in the right ways, how about you teaching all of us? You're eager to tell the Gentiles not to steal? Have the Jews stolen? You teach the heathen not to commit adultery, but have you been so pure? You say that you hate idolatry, but have you not robbed heathen temples? You, so proud of your law, Raspusen, but every time you break the law, you dishonor your God. I repeat, the name of God is blasphemed among the non-Jews because of your behavior."

Raspusen roared back, "Stick to the subject, Paul. The subject is circumcision, and I am circumcised." Paul thundered back, "Circumcision has no value if you do not obey the law. And circumcision only has value if you observe *all* the law. But learn a little more about the law, Raspusen. If you, arrogant, boastful man, if you ever break the law even once in all your life, then you, Raspusen, you've become uncircumcised. In the eyes of God, Raspusen, the foreskin grows back." Raspusen was trembling with fury. Paul, unquelled, continued, "On the other hand, if a Gentile who has never been circumcised keeps the requirements of the law, in the eyes of God, that Gentile is circumcised. Yes, Raspusen, a Gentile is circumcised if he keeps the requirements of the law. Even with the foreskin and without the knife, if he keeps the law in God's sight, he's circumcised. The man who has not been circumcised physically, but obeys the law, that man is going to rise up and condemn you." Paul's next

words were clearly for Raspusen and for him alone, but he lifted his eyes and spread his arms to take in the entire Hebrew sector.

"Yes, you do have the written code concerning circumcision. Nonetheless, you are lawbreakers. No man is a true Hebrew; he is only a Hebrew outwardly. If you are only circumcised physically, that does not make you a Jew. Judge Raspusen, you claim to be a Jew. Well, you're only a Jew if you are one inwardly. Today, we're not dealing with a physical matter. Circumcision is an internal spiritual matter. Physical circumcision is the picture of a spiritual work, a work which takes place deep within the heart. Circumcision is a work done by the Spirit of God alone. True circumcision is not done by the knife of a priest or a rabbi. A man who has been circumcised in his heart is that man who has offered true praise to God. Furthermore, you arrogant, conceited, pompous Pharisee, if there is any praise reserved for that man who glorifies God, that praise will come from God. It will not come from man."

An electrified silence hung over the entire arena. Paul turned back to the judge. He now spoke in a low, thoughtful voice. "Your Honor, I would like to present my summation."

The judge said nothing. He sat there pensively staring into vacant space. Unconsciously, he thumped his desk with his forefinger. It was obvious that he was mulling over in his mind just exactly how he was going to rule in this case. "You may proceed, Paul."

Paul turned, faced the Gentiles, turned again, faced the Jews. Then once more, he faced the judge. "Does the circumcised Jew really have any advantage over a Gentile? Yes. The Jews were given the oracles of God, and that is an advantage. Of course, some Jews do not have any faith in God. But that does not nullify God's faithfulness. God is true even if every man is a liar." It was one of their own who said, his name was David, "You, Lord, have proven right in all your words. When you judge, your judgment is fair." With those words barely out of Paul's mouth, Raspusen was on his feet.

"You are saying, Paul, that every time God judges us to be sinners, it proves that that gives glory to God. Is this true, Paul? Would it not also be true that if we should go out of here and sin a great deal, then there would be even more praise that God would receive and more glory?" Now Paul was visibly angered. He opened his mouth to respond, but Raspusen continued, "According to your logic, we should keep on sinning. We should sin more and more, so that it will prove God is right among us and therefore give glory to Him." The entire Jewish section of the stadium, sensing weakness in Paul's argument, began shouting, "Shall we sin to prove that God is right?" The judge was about to call for order when Paul's voice rose above the cry of all the Jews.

"Raspusen ben Phineas, I have heard this kind of twisted reasoning on your part before. It is you, not me, who has given this interpretation. Raspusen, you have spread this story before. I do not teach this, and you know it. You started this tale." There was stunned silence until now. No one was aware that these two men had known one another in the past.

"Now I ask you, Raspusen, shall we say that God is wrong in bringing his wrath upon man? May it never be! You have spread the story that I preached, 'Let us do evil that good may result.' You, Raspusen, are going to be condemned for drawing such a conclusion and telling that tale on me. All men will be judged fairly, and God will receive glory. He will receive glory on the day He assesses your heart for what's in it. God has the right to judge you, sir, for God is God."

Paul turned back to the judge once more. "Your Honor, this concludes my case against the Jews. I now conclude my case against the Gentiles."

"Proceed, Paul and Raspusen. I would remind you to mind your decorum."

Paul continued, "I have essentially the same thing to say to the Gentiles as I did to the Jews. According to the standards they themselves drew up, the Gentiles have done evil. Both Jews and Gentiles will be judged by the law, either the Jewish law or the law of conscience. God alone knows just how many of you have broken those two laws. Your Honor, by the statements they themselves have established, by the standards that they've asked to be judged by, most of the people gathered here today stand condemned. That, I believe, they will not be found right with God. Their own standard has condemned them."

"This ends my summation, Your Honor. The decision of the destiny of man, Your Honor, is now in your hands." It was almost as though the judge had not heard Paul's words at all. He was staring again vacantly, oblivious to those around him. After several minutes of silence, he turned and cleared his throat.

"The case has been heard. It's been fairly stated, fairly argued. You have been drawn here today from the north, the south, the east, and the west, and you have come from all places and from all periods of time, from all of human history. And now falls my lot to render a decision. But I am not qualified to make a decision. Only God knows the heart of each person in this building. I have instructed, therefore, a courier to present to the Supreme Judge a record of all the proceedings that have taken place here in this stadium. This you must understand. Throughout the life of each of you, your God has watched you. He has heard your words. He has seen your deeds. Most of all, he knows your hearts. It is he, and he alone, who must render judgment in this trial. You are to take note that his judgment will be rendered against you, not mine, and that it will be not toward people, but toward each of you individually.

Now if the truth be known, I have the notion that the living God has already made a decision concerning every one of you in this case. Therefore I have asked the Supreme Judge to simply send to this court a list of names, just a list of names, that's all. A list of names of all the Gentiles whom God has judged to be right in his eyes. I've asked the Supreme Judge to send me a list of names, just the names, of all the Jews who are right with God by the fact that they have fully obeyed the law. And I remind you that is the standard you have asked God to judge you by.

The stadium was filled with light whispers, then suddenly silence reigned. The door of the back of the arena had opened; the courier had come in. Paul glanced quickly into the faces of the crowd. Everywhere there was anxiety. Insecurity was written across the faces of every human being present. Except one. Except one. Raspusen sat in his chair, arrogant, confident, and as unmoved as ever. Written upon his face was disdain for others and confidence that his name would be on that list if it was the only name there.

It seemed to take an agonizingly long time for that courier to make his way down the aisles to the judge. The Lord's leather satchel hung over his shoulder. All eyes were on that satchel. There was but one question in every mind. Just how big is that scroll inside that satchel? The courier laid the satchel on Paul's desk and looked up at the judge questioningly. The judge motioned to the courier to open the contents. The young man pulled out a leather pouch securely fastened by a cord. Slowly, meticulously, the young man began untying the knot. The agony of anticipation hung over the vast arena like a cloud. At last, the leather pouch opened. Not an eye blinked as the young man pulled it out. A scroll emerged, covered, completely covered in wax. The courier began to break the wax. Beneath the waterproof paraffin was a piece of sheepskin. Finally, the young man lifted the scroll from out of the sheepskin.

Paul's eyes automatically swept the audience. Perspiration was pouring down every face, even the judge's. There was one exception. Raspusen was as calm, as cool, and as unmoved as ever. At that moment, the youth very deliberately raised the scroll above his head for all to see. A long, low moan rose from the assembly. The scroll was very small. The lad handed the scroll to the judge. The judge's hands were shaking perceptibly as he carefully unrolled the fragile parchment. Once unfolded, it could be seen by everyone that it was no more than two hands' breath long.

At best, there could only be a few names on that scroll. How many? A dozen? Two dozen? At the most? Perhaps one or two? Raspusen straightened his frame, seeming to grow in both confidence and arrogance by the moment. And now the judge stood. It was the most tense moment ever recorded. The judge's eyes swept the scroll, and as he read the contents, his whole body began to shake. At last, the judge spoke. His voice was thin. His face betrayed his shock at what the scroll contained.

"We have here that which I feared the most. The Supreme Judge of the Universe, the Creator Himself, has already judged each of you. And I remind you individually that the news is not good, not good at all. It is now my duty to read this verdict. This, I remind you, is God's decision. I must remind you that, having read this document, it will be my task to pass judgment upon the guilty." The judge's voice trailed off. After a moment, he continued, his eyes vacant, his face ashen.

"I will ask for absolute silence so that every person in this place may clearly hear God's verdict upon each of you. And now I read the decision. It is God's decision. It is God's verdict." He cleared his throat. "These are the words of God:

There is no one who is righteous.
No one who is wise.
No one who worships God.

All of you have turned away from me.
You have all gone wrong.
You all have done what is wrong.
And none has done what is right.
Not even one.

Your words are full of deadly deceit.
Wicked lies roll off your tongues.
Dangerous threats like snakes' poisons come from your lips.
Your speech is filled with bitter curses.
You are quick to hurt and to kill.
You leave ruin and destruction wherever you go.
You have not known the path of peace.
Nor have you learned reverence for me, the living God.

There is none righteous. No, no, not one."

At first, there was total silence. "That is the verdict," said the judge grimly, his voice choking.

Then there were the slightest sounds of weeping, a moan, a cry, a wail. Then the whole arena seemed to rock with one mournful cry. Everyone was struggling to find his or her way to deal with the faults of their inevitable fate. But Paul took note of one person in particular in his reaction to the verdict. Raspusen had fainted dead away.

"It is time for the sentence. It is with great sorrow that I do this," said the judge. "Even if a few of you had been found right in the sight of God, it would have made this moment a little less painful for all of us. It seems that living a good life was a poor place for man to pen his hopes. Obeying the law, worse still. Now let no man envy my position—that of passing sentence on the whole human race. Yet I really have no voice in this matter. This is the verdict of God Himself. Those of you who are Gentiles, you set up your own code of living a good life, and you failed your own standard. Those of you who are Jews, you set obedience to the law as your standard, and you have fallen short of your own standard. Each and all of you have undeniably failed."

"Would you all rise?"

With those words, the entire population of humanity solemnly stood. Cries of sorrow, deep sobs, and convulsions of agony could be heard everywhere. The human race was now without hope. Judgment on all mankind had come at last.

"There is no hope for any of you. The way you chose has failed you, and you have failed the way which you have chosen. No human being is right with God. There is consequently no escape. There is no other way of salvation left to you—not to any of you. No salvation possible now."

Therefore, as one appointed by the living God to execute His will, I must now sentence each and all of you to...

"Wait! Your Honor! Don't say it! Wait! Don't pass it! It's your Honor! Wait! Wait!" Everyone in the room turned toward the door at the rear. A courier had burst into the courtroom, screaming at the top of his voice.

"Your Honor, wait! Wait!" cried the young man as he ran toward the judge. "Wait! Wait, Your Honor! Listen, Your Honor. There is another way! There is another way. Your Honor, hear me! There is another way! Another way to be found right with God has been found."

And once more, Raspusen fainted. Dead away.