

## Romans Session 31

### The False Security of Knowledge

*Romans 2:17-24 (NASB)*

- <sup>17</sup> *But if you bear the name "Jew" and rely upon the Law and boast in God,*  
<sup>18</sup> *and know His will and approve the things that are essential, being instructed out of the Law,*  
<sup>19</sup> *and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness,*  
<sup>20</sup> *a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of the immature, having in the Law the embodiment of knowledge and of the truth,*  
<sup>21</sup> *you, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that one shall not steal, do you steal?*  
<sup>22</sup> *You who say that one should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?*  
<sup>23</sup> *You who boast in the Law, through your breaking the Law, do you dishonor God?*  
<sup>24</sup> *For "THE NAME OF GOD IS BLASPHEMED AMONG THE GENTILES BECAUSE OF YOU," just as it is written.*

Tonight we come to the second false religious security that Paul mentions, and it is a knowledge of God's **Law**.

We have seen Him shoot down the false security of their heritage and now he takes on their knowledge of the **Law** that is in this context the Old Testament.

This **Law** represented is not only the Pentateuch, the five books of the Mosaic **Law**, but also what were called the writings (Psalms, Proverbs, etc.) and the prophets.

The **Law** encompassed all of God's revelation until that time: His revelation about His covenants, His blessings, His cursings, His warnings, His promises, His rites and ceremonies, His moral standards, and His teaching about Himself and about man and the plan of redemption.

In regard to the Jews' knowledge of that divine revelation, the apostle mentions four aspects: what they learned of the **Law** (v-17b-18), what they taught about it (v-19-20), what they did in light of it (v-21-22), and what they caused by breaking it (v-23-24)

#### WHAT THEY LEARNED ABOUT THE LAW

**Romans 2:17-24 (NASB)**

<sup>17</sup> *But if you bear the name "Jew" and rely upon the Law and boast in God,*  
<sup>18</sup> *and know His will and approve the things that are essential, being instructed out of the Law,*

Taken by itself, this statement by Paul might seem to have been a commendation. But as he soon makes clear, it was a strong indictment, because the Jews did not live up to the **Law** they knew so well and praised so highly.

Most Jews of that day were proud and self-righteous about their heritage and had come to rely upon their knowledge of the Law and their boasting in God as means of satisfying the Lord.

They would recite such passages as;

**Psalms 147:19-20 (NASB)**

<sup>19</sup> *He declares His words to Jacob, His statutes and His ordinances to Israel.*  
<sup>20</sup> *He has not dealt thus with any nation; And as for His ordinances, they have not known them. Praise the LORD!*

Now since it was impossible for anyone to keep all of God's **Law** perfectly, some of the rabbis began teaching that merely learning the facts of the **Law** was sufficient to please God.

Weakening the purpose of the **Law** still further some taught that the mere possession of it, in the form of written scrolls, was sufficient. Still others taught that Jews were safe from God's judgment simply because, as a people, they were the specially chosen recipients and custodians of God's **Law**.

**The Old Testament** makes its purpose quite clear, however, and it repeatedly warns against Jews placing their trust in outward ceremonies and objects even those, such as the priestly sacrifices and the Temple, which God had ordained.

Jeremiah says;

**Jeremiah 7:3-7 (NASB)**

<sup>3</sup> *Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, "Amend your ways and your deeds, and I will let you dwell in this place.*  
<sup>4</sup> *"Do not trust in deceptive words, saying, 'This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD.'*

<sup>5</sup> *"For if you truly amend your ways and your deeds, if you truly practice justice between a man and his neighbor,*  
<sup>6</sup> *if you do not oppress the alien, the orphan, or the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place, nor walk after other gods to your own ruin,*  
<sup>7</sup> *then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers forever and ever.*

In other words spiritual safety and security was not in the Temple but in God Himself and in faithful obedience to the divine truth and righteousness which His Temple represented.

When ungodly Jews would **boast in God** it was really a means of boasting in themselves, in the unique privileges and blessings they thought were theirs by right rather than by grace.

Self-righteous, presumptuous Jews were satisfied simply to **know His will**, without obeying it. They knew what God required and what He forbade, what He commanded and what He prohibited, what He approved and what He disapproved, what He rewarded and what He punished.

But rather than saving them, that knowledge became a judgment against them, because they refused to live by it and refused to accept the remedy for such failure.

They were also willing to **approve the things that are essential**.

*Dokimazo* (**approve**) carried the idea of testing in order to prove the value of something, such as precious metals.

In other words the Jews had the means not only to know what was right and wrong but also to discern what the most important part of God's law was.

Jews were also continually **being instructed out of the Law**.

*Katecheo* (**being instructed**) is the term from which catechism is derived.

It had the general meaning of oral instructions of any sort but was especially associated with teaching by repetition.

Both at home and in the synagogues, Jewish boys in particular were systematically and thoroughly **instructed out of the Law**.

Not only rabbis but also many other Jewish men memorized large portions of the Old Testament, which they often recited in public as a demonstration of piety.

It is ironic that ancient Jews considered wisdom to consist of acting according to the knowledge one had, whereas the ancient Greeks simply equated wisdom with knowledge.

By New Testament times, however, many Jews, especially the religious leaders, had, in practice, accepted the Greek view of wisdom. Whether they did so intentionally or not, the consequence was that they felt content with merely knowing God's law and had little desire or motivations to obey it. They knew much but obeyed little.

So we come to the next thing Paul speaks of:

## WHAT THEY TAUGHT ABOUT THE LAW

***Romans 2:19-20 (NASB)***

***<sup>19</sup> and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness,***

***<sup>20</sup> a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of the immature, having in the Law the embodiment of knowledge and of the truth,***

The Jews not only felt secure in what they knew but also in what they taught. Considering themselves to be the most religiously wise, they naturally thought themselves to be the most competent teachers of the spiritually unwise, namely the Gentiles, who did not have the benefit of God's written revelation.

But Israel's continued unfaithfulness to God and disobedience of His Word disqualified her as an example and teacher to the unenlightened Gentiles.

And when Jews made an occasional convert to Judaism, they made him worse off than he was before.

***Matthew 23:15 (NASB)***

***<sup>15</sup> "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel around on sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.***

Instead of leading Gentiles to trust in the true God and become obedient to His will, they Jewish leaders engulfed converts in the vast rabbinacle system of ma-made, legalistic traditions.

In this passage, Paul mentions four specific areas in which many Jews considered themselves to be spiritually superior teachers.

**First**, Paul said, *"you are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind"*

Jews in general, and the scribes and Pharisees in particular, considered themselves to be superior mentors of the community in spiritual and moral matters.

They considered themselves to be religious guides to their unlearned Jewish brethren and especially to the spiritually blind Gentile pagans.

But because of their arrogant pride and blatant hypocrisy, Jesus charge them with being *"blind guides"*

Far from being able to guide others they were desperately needing guidance themselves.

**Second** Paul notes that most Jews considered themselves to be a **light to those who are in darkness**.

Actually that was precisely the role God had intended for Israel.

He had called the people to be a spiritual light to the Gentiles, and as already noted they were to be the people through which, *"all the families of the earth shall be blessed" Gen 12:3*

Jesus declares His disciples to be *"the light of the world"* and charges them to put their light on a lampstand, where it can be seen and will do some good.

**Matthew 5:14-16 (NASB)**

<sup>14</sup> *"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden;*

<sup>15</sup> *nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house.*

<sup>16</sup> *"Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.*

That has always been God's intention for His people.

He gives them light not only for their own spiritual benefit but also for the spiritual benefit of the rest of the world, before whom they are His witnesses.

**Third** the self-righteous Jew prided himself as being a **corrector of the foolish**.

Again, the primary focus was on the Gentile, even the wisest of whom most Jews considered to be **foolish** in the area of religion.

**Fourth** the self-righteous Jew thought of himself as a **teacher of the immature**.

The idea is that of teaching very small children, in this case, children in the Jewish faith.

In light of the context, it is likely that the term **immature** here represents Gentile proselytes to Judaism, who needed special instructions.

They not only needed to learn God's law but also needed to rid themselves of the many pagan ideas and practices in which they had been brought up.

Through God's unique revelation of Himself and of His will to Israel, Jews had **in the Law the embodiment of knowledge and of the truth.**

*Morphosis (embodiment)* has the basic meaning of an outline or sketch.

It therefore seems better to translate the word here as "semblance" or "appearance" because throughout this passage Paul emphasizes the religious superficiality of most of the Jews of his day.

He uses the same word in 2 Tim. 3

**2 Timothy 3:5 (NASB)**

***<sup>5</sup> holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; Avoid such men as these.***

Here he warns men that in the last days, that some would hold a form (*morphosis*) of godliness, although they will have denied its power.

In both passages, the idea of a counterfeit is implied.

The Jews did indeed through **the Law** have the revelation of divine **knowledge and truth**, but their understanding, teaching, and exemplifying of it had become so encrusted with rabbinical tradition that God's True **Law** was generally unknown and disregarded.