

Romans Session 32

The False Security of Relationship with the Law

Romans 2:21-24 (NASB)

²¹ *you, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that one shall not steal, do you steal?*

²² *You who say that one should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?*

²³ *You who boast in the Law, through your breaking the Law, do you dishonor God?*

²⁴ *For "THE NAME OF GOD IS BLASPHEMED AMONG THE GENTILES BECAUSE OF YOU," just as it is written.*

WHAT THEY DID IN RELATION TO THE LAW (2:21-22)

Paul has been showing the Jews of the Roman Church the areas of false security that many of them were relying upon for their Eternal safety. He has spoken of the false security of Heritage, and of Knowledge. He now takes on a third area of false security which was related to what they did in response to the law they claimed to know and teach.

Paul here contends that their understanding and teaching not only fell far short of God's law but that they themselves disobeyed it.

Even when they taught it they taught it hypocritically.

Just as Satan sometimes disguises himself as an angel of light, false teachers sometimes teach the truth for their own selfish and perverse ends.

In theological terms, their preaching reflects orthodoxy (right doctrine), but their living does not reflect orthopraxy (right practice).

They are like corrupt officials or judges whose lives are in direct contradiction of the laws they have sworn to uphold and enforce.

And because of their greater responsibility, they bring upon themselves greater punishment when they break those laws.

The Psalmist sternly warned ungodly men who presume to teach in God's name.

Psalm 50:16-20 (NASB)

¹⁶ *But to the wicked God says, "What right have you to tell of My statutes And to take My covenant in your mouth?*

¹⁷ *"For you hate discipline, And you cast My words behind you.*

¹⁸ *"When you see a thief, you are pleased with him, And you associate with adulterers.*

¹⁹ *"You let your mouth loose in evil And your tongue frames deceit.*

²⁰ *"You sit and speak against your brother; You slander your own mother's son.*

Even teachers who are true believers are held especially accountable for living out what they teach.

James therefore gives the somber caution:

James 3:1 (NASB)

¹ *Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment.*

Like the wicked teachers the psalmist castigated, the hypocritical Jew of Paul's day would often **teach another** person the truths of God's Word but would fail to **teach** them to himself. Even less would he obey those truths himself.

Such men were typified by the scribes and Pharisees, of whom Jesus said,

Matthew 23:3 (NASB)

³ therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say things and do not do them.

Paul mentions three areas of their spiritual and moral hypocrisy:

1. Stealing
2. Adultery,
3. Sacrilege.

He asks:

Romans 2:21b (NASB)

²¹ You who preach that one shall not steal, do you steal?

Against the clear pronouncements of the Mosaic Law against theft, it was very common in ancient Judaism. Isaiah rebuked those;

Isaiah 56:11 (NASB)

¹¹ And the dogs are greedy, they are not satisfied. And they are shepherds who have no understanding; They have all turned to their own way, Each one to his unjust gain, to the last one.

Ezekiel denounced those who;

Ezekiel 22:12 (NASB)

¹² "In you they have taken bribes to shed blood; you have taken interest and profits, and you have injured your neighbors for gain by oppression, and you have forgotten Me," declares the Lord GOD.

Amos wrote of those who stole by making the bushel smaller and the shekel bigger and by cheating with dishonest scales (**Amos 8:5**)

Malachi accused his fellows Jews even of robbing God by with-holding some of the tithes an offerings owed to Him. (**Mal. 3:8-9**)

When Jesus cleansed the Temple during the last week of His earthly ministry, He censured the money changers and sacrifice merchants for making His father's house a robbers den (**Matt 21:13**)

The second area of Hypocrisy related to sexual sin.

Romans 2:22a (NASB)

²² You who say that one should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery?

As with stealing the clear implications is that they practiced the very evil they condemned in others. Many Jewish men tried to circumvent the Mosaic command against adultery by divorcing their wives and marrying another woman to whom they were attracted.

But Jesus declared that divorce and remarriage on any ground other than sexual infidelity results in adultery. Just as surely as if no divorce is involved

Matthew 5:32 (NASB)

³² but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the reason of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

Adultery can even be committed without the physical act.

Matthew 5:28 (NASB)

²⁸ but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

And the third area of hypocrisy related to sacrilege;

Romans 2:22b (NASB)

²² You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?

The root word behind abhor, "bdelusso" means to stink, to reek.

Although Israel had fallen into idolatry repeatedly during the period of the monarchies, since the Babylonian exile Jews have never practiced that evil to any significant degree.

During the Greek and Roman occupations after their return from Babylon, Jews developed a strong abhorrence for anything remotely resembling idolatry.

Because some Caesars had declared themselves to be gods, Jews even loathed handling Roman coins, because Caesar's image was inscribed on them.

To **rob temples** may have referred to Jews who robbed their own Temple in Jerusalem.

As noted before they often robbed God by withholding part of their tithes and offerings.

Paul however had something different in mind here.

The Mosaic Law strictly forbade Israelites from making personal gain from the idols they seized after conquering pagan enemies.

Deuteronomy 7:25 (NASB)

²⁵ "The graven images of their gods you are to burn with fire; you shall not covet the silver or the gold that is on them, nor take it for yourselves, or you will be snared by it, for it is an abomination to the LORD your God.

By New Testament times the nation of Israel had long since ceased conquering Gentile Territories, but is it possible that individual rogue Jews plundered pagan temples for purely mercenary reasons.

The statement by the town clerk at Ephesus that Paul and his associates were not robbers of temples in Acts 19:37, suggests that it was not uncommon for Jews to be guilty of that offense.

It is possible that, despite the clear Mosaic prohibition, the offending Jews rationalized such theft by thinking they were doing God a favor by striking a blow at paganism. But Paul condemns their hypocrisy, their motive was not religious, but mercenary.

Thus Paul shoots down the false security in that what they did in relation to the law reveals the hypocrisy in their belief system.

NOW WHAT DID THEY CAUSE BY BREAKING GOD'S LAW?

Romans 2:23-24 (NASB)

²³ *You who boast in the Law, through your breaking the Law, do you dishonor God?*

²⁴ *For "THE NAME OF GOD IS BLASPHEMED AMONG THE GENTILES BECAUSE OF YOU," just as it is written.*

The indictment of verse 24 makes clear that the question in verse 23 was rhetorical.

Many Hypocritical Jews were blatantly **breaking the Divine Law** they so proudly boasted in, and in doing so, they brought **dishonor to God**.

Every sin dishonors God. David confessed,

Psalm 51:4 (NASB)

⁴ *Against You, You only, I have sinned And done what is evil in Your sight, So that You are justified when You speak And blameless when You judge.*

Sin committed by those who claim God's name dishonors Him the most.

Paul here quoting Isaiah;

Isaiah 52:5 (NASB)

⁵ *"Now therefore, what do I have here," declares the LORD, "seeing that My people have been taken away without cause?" Again the LORD declares, "Those who rule over them howl, and My name is continually blasphemed all day long.*

The principle applies even more strongly to Christians, because they not only have greater spiritual light through the New Testament but have greater spiritual resources to obey that light through the indwelling Holy Spirit.

When a believer falls into sin, his witness is ruined and the name of His Lord is sullied before the world. Those who claim to be Christians but persistently live in sin give evidence that they carry the name of Christ in vain.

And because there is no difference between their standard of living and that of the world the Lord's name is **blasphemed**.

Ezekiel 36:17-20 (NASB)

¹⁷ *"Son of man, when the house of Israel was living in their own land, they defiled it by their ways and their deeds; their way before Me was like the uncleanness of a woman in her impurity.*

¹⁸ *"Therefore I poured out My wrath on them for the blood which they had shed on the land, because they had defiled it with their idols.*

¹⁹ *"Also I scattered them among the nations and they were dispersed throughout the lands. According to their ways and their deeds I judged them.*

²⁰ *"When they came to the nations where they went, they profaned My holy name, because it was said of them, 'These are the people of the LORD; yet they have come out of His land.'*

When those who go by God's name are openly sinful, or are exposed as being privately sinful, God and His Word are understandably ridiculed by the world.

The unbeliever has no reason to repent of his sins and turn to God for salvation if he sees professed believers committing the same sins.

Unfortunately, God's name is also ridiculed when the world sees His people being chastised for their sins, as in the case of ancient Israel just cited.

Failing to comprehend the purpose of the chastening, the world reasons, if God makes His own people suffer in that way, why should anyone want to believe in and serve Him?

And on the other hand, when God chooses to withhold chastening for a time, the world may conclude that He is, either, too impotent to control and correct His people or that He approves their sinful acts and is therefore Himself evil. In that way His name is **blasphemed** worst of all.

It would be better for many Christians, true believers as well as false, to hide their religious profession.

Their living is such an obvious contradiction of Scripture that the cause of Christ is mocked and scorned by the world.

Because of the Jews' exclusive self-righteousness, many defamatory legends grew up about them to Gentile lands where they lived.

They were accused of sometimes sacrificing a Gentile in their religious rites and of being descended from a band of leper slaves who managed to escape the rock quarries of Egypt. Unfounded as such stories were, their origin is understandable.

The Gentiles were simply returning in kind the contempt that most Jews had for them.