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Romans

You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal? Romans 2:21

Based on his statement in verses 17-20 Paul now asks a series of questions in Verses 21-23. The questions however begin with "therefore" and thus imply an answer opposite to what would normally be expected. By using a question in this manner, it makes the answer all the more forceful and undeniable.

Beginning with the concept of an instructor passing on instruction, he asks, "You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself?" The answer will be "no." The Jews who have the law have been shown to not live by the law which they possess.

To show this, his first indictment is concerning theft - "You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal?" Obviously not every person reading his words are implicated in theft, but Paul is making a general observation based on the society in which he lived and which both rejected Christ and then nailed Him to the cross. The oral and possibly written testimony at that time by those who bore witness to Him showed this.

Jesus' accusation against the scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 23:2, 3 is one instance we can verify it. These are the very people who possessed the law and

instructed out of it, and yet Jesus showed that they did not live by the standards which they taught -

"The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do."

On another occasion, Jesus explicitly called those who controlled the temple grounds thieves -

"And He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you have made it a 'den of thieves.'" Matthew 21:13

The exact things which the law forbade are the things they practiced, not just in secret, but out in the open. Their actions became a festering wound within the society because the actions of the leaders were seen by all. When this happens, even the commoners begin to act in the same manner.

A perfect example of this is our nation today. Theft in Washington is so open and brazen - transferring money from those who earn it to those who don't - that society sees this as normal and acceptable. The open wound cannot be healed with leaders who are no more than bully thugs.

Favors are bought and sold and exemptions are made for some but not for others. This leads to societal breakdown and "every man for himself." The same was true in Israel at Jesus' time as is evidenced by the gospel record. Again we turn to Matthew to see open theft by the instructors of the law -

"He answered and said to them, "Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition? For God commanded, saying, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.' But you say, 'Whoever says to his father or mother, "Whatever profit you

might have received from me is a gift to God"— then he need not honor his father or mother.' Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition." Matthew 15:3-6

The practice of corban was a way of getting around taking care of one's own parents. By devoting assets or money to God, these things could no longer be used for anything else. By making something so devoted, the gift could not be used to help the parents and yet it wasn't actually bound to the temple treasury either. It was somewhat in a state of limbo - it could only be given to the temple or used by the giver. By agreeing to this precept, the leaders in Israel were committing theft against the people who needed it most, the parents who had raised the person and now needed the same care in their old age.

The moral responsibility of those who have the law increases. It doesn't decrease, nor is there an exemption because of the knowledge they possess. Knowledge in no way negates right action. Instead it calls for it and even demands it.

Life application: Here we are studying the Bible and looking deeply into its precepts. We are gaining knowledge and thus much more will be expected of us as we walk through life. The eyes of others are watching us and anticipate that we will set the example for right conduct. Today as you go about your business, reflect on the areas where you may need to correct your habits so that they align with the Name you bear - the Lord Jesus.

You who say, "Do not commit adultery," do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? Romans 2:22

This is the second of three verses asking those questions to which the Jews of his time had to answer, "Yes." The first today concerns adultery - "You who say, 'Do not commit adultery,' do you commit adultery?" The answer is "yes" and it is found in the gospels as were the previous questions. And not only is the answer affirmative to literal adultery, but spiritual adultery as well. In Matthew 12:39, it says this -

"But He answered and said to them, 'An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.'"

Jesus accused those who came to Him looking for a sign of the validation of His authority of being wicked and adulterous. The Ninevites, to whom Jonah was sent, repented at the preaching of Jonah without any miraculous sign. The people of Israel had been given the sign of Jonah in Jesus' preaching that judgment was coming, just as Jonah gave. And yet they failed to repent. They, the stewards of the oracles of God and the people from whom came the prophets saw the repentance of Nineveh based on the word from the God they served, but they were unwilling to do what even the pagans had done. They were attempting to excuse themselves from their obligation based on God's supposed favoritism of them, but instead they only incurred greater guilt.

Concerning literal adultery, the account in John 8:1-11 pointedly shows that the people were willing to judge a woman caught in adultery by bringing her to be stoned and yet excused the male who she was with, though both bore the guilt. Jesus then challenged them to cast the first stone if they were without sin; none did. The premise of the law is that if one commandment is broken, the entire law is broken (James 2:10). As none were without sin, then all had broken the entire law, including adultery. In both respects in this account they were proved to be adulterers.

Paul next makes an interesting comment, "You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?" The people of the law had transgressed so far in the past that the land was literally full of idols. Because of this, and many other transgressions, God's judgment came upon them and they were exiled to Babylon for 70 years. The lesson concerning idolatry was well learned, but this only took care of the outward, blatant sin of having idols set up for worship. Despite the external change, it did nothing to inwardly change the people. Their hearts remained greedy and set on idolatry, even if it wasn't demonstrated in bowing to idols. Instead, they had set up idols in their hearts. Jesus shows us this in Matthew 21:12, 13 -

"Then Jesus went into the temple of God and drove out all those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. And He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you have made it a 'den of thieves.'"

As we continue to see, the very things which the Jews found fault in others were found in them as well. They were trusting in their status as Jews and not in a personal, obedient relationship with God. Each of us needs to continually evaluate our own station to ensure we don't fall into this trap.

Life application: Though we may be born into a Christian home, we are not by default Christians. Though we may be members of our church, it doesn't mean we have a right-standing with God. The only thing we can trust in for God's favor is our faith, mixed with obedience. When these are properly exercised, God will surely turn His face toward us. Take time today to evaluate your walk with the Lord.

You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law? Romans 2:23

This is Paul's final question of indictment against the Jews who rested in the law, but failed to adhere to the precepts they supposedly held in such high esteem. "You who make your boast in the law" implies that they have something worthy of boasting about. Nobody would boast in something of no value. Therefore, the implication is that law is good, the law is right, and the law is holy. Holding up the law as a vital part of their status implies its great value, because their status is derived from that law.

As an example, consider a Bible preacher. He stands in the pulpit and proclaims the glory and splendor of the word. He preaches its precepts. He condemns those who don't adhere to it. His livelihood is based on the Bible, his status is based on the Bible, and the people's trust of the Bible is based on his determined mindset

about the Bible. All of who he is and what he has is because of the Bible; he boasts in the Bible. But Paul goes on...

Despite all the boasting Paul asks, "Do you dishonor God through breaking the law?" The very law the Jews stand on for their livelihood and status is dishonored when they break it. In essence, they have religion but they are not redeemed; they have appearance without reality; they profess, but they do not possess; they have orthodoxy, but they are lacking orthopraxy; they know every precept, but they have no proper practice. Quoting Isaiah, Jesus states these words to the religious leaders of His time -

"Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying:

'These people draw near to Me with their mouth,
And honor Me with their lips,
But their heart is far from Me.
And in vain they worship Me,
Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'" Matthew 15:7-9

How many times have we seen Bible preachers, bishops, pastors, cardinals, evangelists, etc. stand on the Christian message in precept, but fail to adhere to it in practice. Their words and their actions don't sync. This is what Paul has been and is addressing. Albert Barnes rightly states that, "It matters little what a man's speculative opinions may be; his practice may do far more to disgrace religion than his profession does to honor it. It is the life and conduct, and not merely the profession of the lips, that does real honor to the true religion."

A Christian by name only is not a Christian. There must be a moment in the person's life when true acknowledgment of one's own depraved state is realized. After that, it is incumbent on the saved soul to demonstrate it in outward workings of the internal change. To fail in this can only bring disrepute upon the perception of the Bible and upon the Person of Jesus by those who look in their sad direction.

Life application: Are you living out the precepts that you speak to others? If not, mixed signals are being sent which can only adversely affect your testimony and their faith. Take time to evaluate your actions and align them with your professions.