

“Who Are You?”

Romans - the Gospel of God

Romans 2:17-24

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Jeff: Okay, why don't we pray? Father in heaven, we are thankful. And sometimes it's difficult to be thankful. And yet when we reflect upon all that You've done for us in Christ Jesus our Lord, our hearts are immediately postured in such a way as to be thankful toward You. And Father, we ask that that thankfulness that we have toward You would seep out into the rest of our lives, and that we would be mindful that every gift that we have, every blessing that we enjoy, is from Your hand. And so help us to be thankful today. Father, help us to be mindful of the good gifts that You've given. And the best and the most blessed gift of all is life in Christ—the fact that our lives are bound up with Him by faith, and that alone. And that is not from ourselves, but it's a gift from You. You united us to Your Son and so united us to Yourself. You saved us from the wrath and curse that was certainly ours, that we might have an abundant life—yes, in the heavenlies—but even now. So Father, bless us and strengthen us by Your grace, to remind us of the joy that we have in Jesus Christ—the joy that is ours despite circumstances—the joy that is ours despite the hardships of life, the challenges and the obstacles, that we might bow before You morning by morning, evening by evening, and remember that we belong to You, and that nothing can happen to us; nothing does befall us that is outside of Your sovereign administration.

And when we think in that way, Father, we ask that You would continually encourage our hearts. Remind us in our minds that we are Your treasure, just as You are our inheritance. And so, Father, we ask now that You'll bless us and keep us by Your grace. And as we put ourselves before Your means of grace—Your word—we ask that by Your Spirit You will illuminate the Word to us—not that we will simply understand more and have our heads filled with knowledge, but that our hearts would be strangely warmed by Your Spirit who ministers this Word to us, that our relationship with You through this means would be deepened. So Father, we pray all of these things, asking them in Jesus' precious name. Amen.

Brave Men: Amen.

Jeff: All right. So today let's turn to Romans chapter 2. And I'm just going to read verses 17-24. It could be the case that we could include verses 25 to the end of the chapter. But I have a reason for separating those verses out. So we're going to take 17-24 today. Let me read to you the word of God, and remind you as I do that this is the infallible word of God, the inerrant word of God, and so the authoritative word of God. And by now you know what we mean by those words. But it's important that you continue to be reminded of what we mean.

And when we talk about the infallibility of God's word we mean that it's true because it comes from an infallible God. It comes from a God who is truth. And since it comes from an infallible God who is of course truth, it means that the Word is inerrant. *Inerrant* means that it doesn't wander; it doesn't wander from the truth. And therefore it's God's authoritative word. So let me now read to you His word from Romans chapter 2, starting at verse 17.

“But if you call yourself a Jew, and rely on the law and boast in God, and know His will and approve what is excellent, because you are instructed from the law, and if you are sure that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness,

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an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of children, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth, you then who teach others, do you not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal? You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who boast in the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law? For it is written: ‘The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.’”

Now let me just say a couple of words by way of introduction. I think the book of Romans is so important that I think that the flow of it is so important. It’s one of those books where you can dive in almost anywhere, and people do. But there’s a message to this book, a flow to it that I think is really important for us to grasp.

I want you to go back to Romans 1:18 for just a minute. And when you look at Romans 1:18 you’ll again notice that *“the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.”* And then he’s going to go into a series of things starting with homosexuality and idolatry, and culminating with all who give approval to these other things that he says at the end of the chapter. All of these are sins that one could attribute to anyone. And yet it’s likely that Paul is speaking about Gentiles at this point.

Now the reason why we know that, or the reason why we surmise that, is because the sin of homosexuality was to the Jew really the most detestable of all sins. It was really the lowest kind of sin that one could participate in. And so he’s likely not talking about the Jews; he’s talking about the Gentiles.

And contextually, when you get to chapter 2, starting with 1-5, that’s oftentimes viewed as a Jew saying, “You tell them, Paul! That guy is messed up!” And then Paul turns around and says, *“Therefore you have no excuse, O man, everyone who judges, for in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself.”* In other words, “You, a Jew, do the same thing. And so you who pass judgment, do you expect to escape judgment?”

And then you look in chapter 2, verses 6-11. Here he’s dealing with everyone. Now notice: he hasn’t necessarily mentioned the Gentile. He hasn’t yet mentioned the Jew. But now he mentions everyone. He’s talking about God as Judge. He says, *“He will render to each one according to his works.”* Then verse 9: *“For every human being who does evil.”* Now notice what he says: *“the Jew first and also the Greek”*—the Gentile. Now he mentions them. And so he has likely started with the Gentiles—they are sinners; they’re condemned,—he moves to the Jew. And now he says all of you—Jews and Gentiles stand condemned before God.

Now we looked at 12-16. And this is where the Gentile comes back and says, “Wait a minute! How can this be, that I stand condemned like the Jew? I didn’t even have the law.”

And remember: Paul says, “Oh no; you have the law. And it was written upon your heart.” And now in verse 17 he’s going to turn around and he’s going to deal with the Jew.

Now what I want you to notice is this. What’s the point of the flow here? The point of the flow is that everyone—Jew and Gentile alike—are condemned as sinners before God. They bear the wrath and the curse of God. They are the ones *“who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.”* And so the wrath of God is revealed.

Now that’s the flow. And that’s where we are; we’re in the midst of this flow. Now when you think about the context in general, you move through that great passage through 3:21. Just go there for a minute. And we’ll get there; we’re not there yet. But I want you to anticipate it.

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It's in 3:21 and it says, “*But now.*” And you know, those are Greek words, the words of reversal—the Greek turnaround. The unrighteousness of man and the wrath of God are continually on display in these first three chapters. “*But now a righteousness of God has been manifest apart from the law.*”

Why “*apart from the law?*” Because the law is what drives us to condemnation. It sets us under the curse because we continue to break it. “*But now a righteousness from God is revealed apart from the law.*” And that righteousness revealed apart from the law is in Christ. We'll get to all that. But that's the culmination of it. Again, right now we're in the midst of this sort of driving argument, where we are sinners under the wrath and curse of God.

Now what's the point of verse 17 and following? In other words, where are we in this argument? What's going on? How do we understand these verses in this next paragraph?

Well I think what we need to understand is this. Paul is not trying to show us in this paragraph that Jews are sinners. I think that if you were to say to a Jew, “You know that you're a sinner,” he would say, “Duh!” I don't think he would say, “No, no, no; you misunderstand; I am righteous before God.” I don't think he would say that. The Jews understood that they were sinners. So I don't think he's trying to drive the point home that “you guys are sinners.”

So what is he driving at, starting in verse 17? Well, it's this. What he's driving at is, these sins make them as liable to judgment as the Gentiles. In other words, having the law doesn't save you. Having the law is not going to get you out of judgment. In fact, having the law is actually to your detriment. And having the law was a detriment to the Gentiles. Having the law, and that only, is not a good place to be, okay? And that's what he's going to show us in this paragraph.

And I want you to see this. I think you have to read carefully because what he's doing is, he's helping us to see that their trust is in something other than God. And you'll see what that is.

And here's what I want to do. What I want to do is, I'm going to bring this back around when I get there. But I want you to think about it like this. Let's say, for instance, that the Jewish people that we're thinking of from the Old Testament were people who were in the church under age; they were God's people. And the Gentiles were obviously those outside of the church. An application might be made that one could see the application of these verses as pertaining to some in the church today. In other words, this is not an abstract argument against Jewish people who did not understand that having the law was a condemning affair for them. This could be applied to us today. And I'll show you that as we go along. But I want you to keep that in mind, because when I bring it around I don't want you to be too surprised by it, and I want you to have a context for it.

So first of all, what do you think of yourself?
That's really the question that I think the text is posing to the Jew in these early verses. What do you think of yourself?

What did the Jewish person think of himself? Well, another way of saying it is, who do you think you are?

You know, there used to be a guy I knew when I was in high school. And he was two years older than I was. He would go around and he would say this. He would say, “Do you know who I am?” Did you ever have somebody say that to you?

One day a friend of mine pushed me into him. And I turned around and I saw him. We were in a crowded hallway. And he looked at me and he said, “Do you know who I am?”

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And I looked at him and I said, “I do. And if I would have known you were on the other side of me at this moment, I would have had my friend push me even harder.”
(*Laughter*) Now it’s that kind of person who would have grated on you.

Anyway, who do you think you are? That’s the question of the text. Who do you think you are? Well, if you were to ask the Jew that question, they would have answered exactly the way that we find in the text. They would have said, “I am a Jew.”

Now what does that mean? What does that mean? If we were to hear that we would go, “Okay, but what does that mean for the Jewish people to say ‘I am a Jew?’”

Sig: I am a child of the covenant.

Jeff: I think that nails it; yeah. I’m a child of the covenant. I am a chosen one, a chosen person of God.

In fact, you know, you can see this with a friend of mine who went to the Hebrew Institute down in Maryland. And he said that even his professors today who are modern liberal Jews still understood themselves as part of this covenant. So when they spoke about the Exodus—going through the Red Sea—even though they did not believe that the people went through a Red Sea on dry ground like the Bible says, they would talk like this. They would say, “When we went through the Red Sea.”

Now here’s this liberal guy who doesn’t believe that his ancestors went through the Red Sea. But he sees himself in solidarity with the Jewish people as God’s chosen ones. He talks about those people who he may believe didn’t even really exist in history. He says, “when we went through the Red Sea,” because of solidarity. “I am a Jew. I belong to this long history.”

We once took my son to the doctor when he was younger. And we had this one particular doctor; he was a Jewish man. He married a Presbyterian. And I went to his office one day. I think we were going weekly at this point in Nathan’s life.

And I walked into the door and he said to me, “You know, I almost called you.”

I said, “Really? Why?”

And he said, “My wife and I were having a really intense battle about what’s going on with the kids’ education and that sort of thing.” And he said, “You know I’m a Jew, and she’s a Presbyterian.”

And I said, “Oh yeah; I know.”

And he said, “And you know, I’m not religious or anything. But I’m not going to not be a Jew because I can’t disown my Judaism,” right?

What is he saying? “This is who I am; I am a Jew.” I mean, it’s so deeply engraved.

Just as an incidental I said, “What did you do about the education argument?”

He said, “Well, as Jewish people we always let it go with the mothers. So I let it go with the mother.” (*Laughter*) I said, “Okay; all right; great. Time’s up.” (*Laughter*)

So anyway, I’m a Jew Religious stats: chosen by God, covenant people. Then this: *a reliance on the law*. That word has the idea of a trust in or a resting in the law. They rest in the law!

I’ll tell you what. I’ll never forget. I went to Grove City College. I was taking a class in American Indigenous Religious Traditions. And we went to a Jewish synagogue. And we listened to a priest lecture us. He knew we were a bunch of Christians and he had the floor, you know?

So he’s telling us. He said, “You know, the problem with you Christians.” Don’t you love that when somebody starts off like that? (*Laughter*) “The problem with you Christians is that you need Jesus. But we Jews have the law from God.”

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And so the idea of their reliance upon the law is not simply an Old Testament manifestation of Judaism. Today it is a manifestation of Judaism. We’ve got the law.

So the idea that Paul is saying is so much different than their own understanding. In other words, having the law is like having a hot potato; you don’t want it! You don’t want it if that’s all you have, right?

So they have this reliance on the law. We’re Jews; we have this reliance on the law; and we boast in God. They boast in God.

Now why do they boast in God? Well, the text tells us: because they know God’s will.

Now the question that you have to ask yourself is this: How do they know God’s will? And the answer is, because they’ve been instructed in the law!

Do you see what Paul is doing? He’s tying all this stuff that they boast in and that they’re proud of, and all of these things. It’s all tied back to their law, to God’s law. Do you understand that so far? Is that making sense? Is that clear? All right.

Now here’s the deal. I want you to think about it like this. That’s not all. Because of these benefits they have a certain way of viewing themselves. And I want to show you what that is; it’s a certain way of viewing themselves. It’s in verse 19. They are “*guides to the blind.*” They are “*instructors to the foolish.*” And they are “*teachers of children.*”

In other words, “the problem with you Christians is that you have Jesus. But we have the law. And the law tells us what the will of God is. And as a result you ought to listen to us. We’re teachers; we’re instructors; we’re guides. What makes us that way? Why do we see ourselves that way? We have the law.”

This whole passage for Paul is this. Again, let me step outside the argument and just say it like this. The reason Paul puts this passage here is not to help them see that they are sinners, but to help them to understand that this law in which they boast is going to be the source of their own judgment. That’s the idea.

So they have the law, despite the fact that they see themselves as teachers and guides, and so on. But here’s the issue. The law is not bad. This is the thing Paul slips in there. He slips this thing in there in a participial phrase, and it’s this. He says that the law is “*the embodiment of knowledge and truth.*”

Do you notice that? Do you see that? Do you see the way he does that? In verse 29 he says, “*an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of children, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth.*” In other words, this is not wrong. Paul is saying, “Yes, you do have the law. And the law is the embodiment of knowledge and truth.”

And why would he say that? I want you to string a few verses together that we’ve been looking at since the beginning.

Why “*knowledge and truth?*” Well, go back to 1:18 for a moment. “*For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their own unrighteousness*”—here it comes!—“*suppress the truth. For what can be known about God*”—the knowledge of God—“*is plain to them, because God has shown it to them.*” There is truth and knowledge right there.

Now go to verse 24. “*Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator who is blessed forever. Amen.*”

Then jump down to verse 28. “*And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God,*”—there’s the idea of knowledge; they did not see fit to acknowledge God,—“*God gave them up to a debased mind, to do what ought not to be done.*”

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Then look at verse 32. “*Though they know God’s righteous decree*”—there’s the knowledge again,—“*that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them, but give approval to those who practice them.*”

I want you to think about this for just a minute. He asks them a question. Having understood that, he asks them a question. “*You who teach, do you not teach yourself?*” “Do you not know what verse 32 says”: “*that those who practice such things deserve to die?*” “And oh, by the way, those who give their approval to such things deserve the same.” “*You who teach, do you not teach yourself?*” That’s what he’s asking.

And I think that this is a good question for us. I think that sometimes we fit what we just walked through. I mean, we’re in the church. Let’s put it this way: if the Jew is the insider and the Gentile is the outsider, Paul is talking to the insider. He’s talking to the member of the Old Testament church. Then you could rain that paradigm over on our own situation. And we would all be effectively believers, addressed in the same way.

In other words, we who see ourselves as guides and instructors and teachers because we have the Scriptures, because we have church tradition, because we have all these things, are we allowing those things to instruct us? Or are we just instructing others while we sin and don’t say a word about it? It’s that kind of thing. It’s that kind of thing that we have to challenge ourselves with. What are your thoughts on that?

Brave Man: Let’s just whip on the Jews.

Jeff: What’s that again?

Brave Man: Let’s just whip on the Jews.

Jeff: Yeah; let’s just talk about the Jews instead. Yeah, okay; good. (*Laughter*) It’s one of those things where—Go ahead.

Ted Wood: Can you give us any examples that would be helpful?

Jeff: I’ll give you a flame. Think about this. Think about the Christian parent who says to his child, “Son, you have to pray. You have to have a devotional life. You have to be reading the Scriptures.” And that parent walks out the door every morning and doesn’t have his own devotional life. He doesn’t pray. He comes home at night and goes to bed after watching TV. He doesn’t pray; he doesn’t have his own devotional life.

That’s an example, in sort of a classic way, of this illustration right here, of this teaching right here. That is, you have the law and you know what’s good—the embodiment of knowledge. You instruct your son in what he must do, but you don’t do it yourself. Bishop, were you going to say something? Oh, okay. That would be an example.

I mean, you could give bigger sins, right? Of course. But the example I gave would hit a number of us. Go ahead.

Ted: I think that it’s more subtle. And that would be that we talk about the need for God’s mercy on ourselves. We want mercy for all the times we fumble. But we’re not ready to give others mercy. And we will say, especially in this highly charged political era, (and I’m not just pointing out conservatives; it’s anybody in this room.) But I point to people who are progressives or liberals—showing no mercy to them, knowing that what they believe and do is awful because they don’t have the knowledge to do otherwise. So I was just thinking about that. I know that I’m quick to want mercy from God and not to show it. I don’t want people to bear grudges toward me. But I would hold a grudge. And that’s more subtle.

Jeff: It is more subtle. And it’s sort of a manifestation of something a little more subjective than the objectivity of the law too, right?

Ted: It is; right.

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Bishop: Just to take a look out of St. Paul’s book, we will kick somebody out of the congregation for adultery. But we have imaginations of our own that are awful, that are adulterous.

Jeff: Yeah.

Jim Hamilton: I was just going to give another example. (*Unclear; a golf illustration*)

Jeff: Well, you know, the golf illustration is an interesting one. I’m not a golfer. But I listen to Sinclair Ferguson and I’ve had classes with him. And he’s always using golf illustrations, so they stay with me.

Ted: He’s Scottish.

Jeff: Yeah. And when he was in college he actually played for his country. Apparently he was very good. But anyway, he would talk about the golfing manual. And he would say that guys would be out on the golf course. And if you would violate one little rule of the manual, you know they would be up in arms. But he said, “How many of those men are out on the golf course breaking the law of God every day?” And they would be up in arms if you confronted them with that—with the breaking of God’s law. And so he said that it’s interesting. We’re willing to follow the laws that bring us the most pleasure, right? (*Laughter*)

Mike Davis: One of the things that this impacts me with is that as I get up and teach different people, it impresses me that I need to be more transparent about my whole life and in front of other people. I don’t want to act like I am and you’re not. But we’ve all heard of many preachers and teachers that are putting on a perfect front, acting like they have it all together when they absolutely don’t, right?

Jeff: Mm-hmm.

Mike: And so this guy stirs my heart to that. The good thing that I see in the Scripture through and through, in a context that we’ll go through later down the road, is the righteousness of Christ in chapter 3. And I’m so excited about that: that we don’t stop right here.

Jeff: Yeah.

Mike: It would leave us without hope if we stopped right here.

Jeff: Yeah.

Mike: So the context is the righteousness of Christ.

Jeff: Yeah. You know, the interesting thing about it, to kind of piggyback on what Mike said, is that I agree with Mike. We need to be transparent; we need to be real with one another about our own failings. I think the minister who gets up and uses sort of the you, you, you all the time is really setting up a barrier between himself and his people, as if you do this, but I don’t. But there is a sense in which we’ve got to be wise about our transparency, right?

For instance, I am not fully transparent about all of my grade school and high school woes and fumbles to my child, right? My child probably thinks that I was the best little kid that ever went to school. (*Laughter*) And I am okay with that. (*Laughter*) For the time being, you know? It’s when they get out that you can start. But in some cases there has to be limited transparency with children.

You know, I was meeting with a guy one time about accountability. It was sort of a mentoring relationship. And I could tell that he was feeling the heat and the pressure of his sins because he just wasn’t forsaking them at all, ever. And I knew what he was trying to do. He asked me this one morning; he never asked me this question. He asked me this question. He said, “Do you ever struggle with this?”

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And I said, “And that would be none of your business.” (*Laughter*) Because I knew what he was trying to do. As soon as he found out that I struggled with this, that or the other thing, it would then be about me, or it would be me used as an excuse for him. But it would always be an angle.

So I think that limited transparency is really good. In a room like this, where we know that the audio never reaches our wives’ ears, (*Laughter*), this is the place to be fully transparent. Yes, Bishop?

Bishop: I was just wondering how you interpret “*you who abhor idols, do you rob temples?*”

Jeff: Yeah, right. Let me get to that.

Bishop: All right.

Jeff: Remind me at the end and I’ll get to that point. Go ahead.

Jim: It’s just one of those things. I have four children, and my wife did a good job of raising them. (*Laughter*) But when I was concerned about them doing something I didn’t think was proper, even though I might have done it in my younger days, I would tell them, “That’s not something we should do.” So, I mean, that’s kind of two-faced. But I didn’t want them making any of the mistakes that I made.

Jeff: Sure. That’s a limited transparency. I mean, there are all kinds of things. There are a couple of things that I would have done in high school that I might not share with my own kid, right?—and even speak against them. But, you know, my son’s a little older now. He found out that I told him not to do certain things that he found out that I did. He said, “Dad, you’re hypocritical.” And I said, “No; I’m wiser now.” Just because I did them doesn’t mean that I would condone them now, you know?

Ted: Would you care to share some of those? (*Laughter*)

Jeff: No; I would not care to share them. (*Laughter*) You know, the interesting thing is that if we all wrote down the ten things that we did in school, probably eight of the ten things on our list would match everybody else’s. The two that would be standouts would be Ted.

Ted: That’s right.

Jeff: I don’t hear anyone laughing. (*Laughter*)

Ted: I’ve even thought about them. (*Laughter*)

Jeff: All right. What do you think of yourself?

Ted: I was just going to say that even in the church there are sins of the past that are acceptable, and sins of the past that aren’t acceptable.

Jeff: Yeah.

Ted: And you can’t be transparent about everything, because you’ll get a pastor who says, “Well, I was a drug addict, but thank You Jesus; I’m out of that”, and “Hallelujah, Pastor; that’s great; praise God!” “I was a sex addict.”

“Oh, really?” I mean, it’s different. So just be careful about what you say, because even though we say we love each other and forgive with mercy, we really don’t.

Jeff: Yeah. Well, let me remind you of something. I actually think that *Pilgrim’s Progress* is very helpful. Do you remember when Christian and Faithful leave the Doubting Castle? Remember, Doubting Castle is probably the worst place in the book. Christian is thinking a couple of different times about taking his own life. I mean, it’s just a really abysmal place to be. And they end up getting out with the Key of Promise around his neck. They get out and they go back to the stile that took them out of the way and into the Territory of the Giant. And they put up a sign, and then they go on their way.

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And where do they go next? They go to the Delectable Mountains, where the shepherds are. And you remember that when the shepherds are showing them around, the shepherds show them the tombs. And they show them the people who are walking blindly in the midst of the tombs. And they say, “Who are those people?”

And the shepherds say, “Those people went to—Oh, by the way, did you see that there was a stile back there along the way? If you go over that stile then you will find yourself in Giant Despair’s land, and he will put you in Doubting Castle. And he put out both men’s eyes and he led them to the tombs so that they could wander in the midst of the tombs forever.”

And do you remember this? This is really powerful. *“Water filled their eyes and they looked at each other. But they didn’t say anything to the shepherds.”*

And I think that’s the discretion you’re talking about. I think Bunyan is indicating that you don’t have to tell even the next shepherd in your life, right? You don’t have to tell them every sin that you’ve ever committed. You don’t have to go into everything. It’s just an interesting thing to ponder.

Ted: And the question I was asked is, why not? And the answer I would say is that in the end, the answer is that indeed we are the body of Christ. But we are far from Christ in His perfection. I mean, you can tell anything to Jesus, right?

Jeff: I would give this answer. You ask the question, why not? Why not tell them everything? And I would give this answer. I would say, because we are not people who are first and foremost identified by our sin. Remember, Faithful was the sex addict. He said, *“I fled from Wanton, but a piece of her remained with me,”* right? But he’s not called “The Wanton Man,” right? He’s called “Faithful.” And I think that plays into the answer.

Well, let me press on for the next couple minutes because I want us to get there and close; sorry. What do you think of yourself? Who are you really? That’s the question here. And there are three sins where Paul is trying to say, “Look. You who are teachers of the law, who rely on the law, who boast that you have the law, these three sins characterize you.” And they are transgressions of the law.

First of all, there’s stealing. Do you teach “do no stealing,” and then do you steal? Do you teach not to commit adultery, and then do you commit adultery?

What about robbing temples? This is an interesting one. Look what he says. *“You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?”*

What is he saying there? If you look at the commentaries on this you will find a whole host of speculations about what this could be. I’ll tell you what I think it is. Again, it’s no more than a speculative answer. But I think that what Paul is doing is, he’s saying it somewhat facetiously. Can I put it like this? He’s saying, “You who abhor idols, you rob from idols. That is, you are idolaters to yourselves.”

So you who abhor idols and talk badly about all these idols, you might as well be the ones who go and take the idols and worship them yourselves; you rob idols. I think that’s the idea. So robbing idols is taking their practices for your own. That’s how I’m looking at it. So they are idolaters. Go ahead.

I think what we have here, and I think what Paul is driving at with these three examples is that he’s showing us that we are corrupt externally; we steal, we commit adultery. But we’re corrupt internally; we’re idolaters. So I think he has us coming and going at this point; that’s the idea.

“Who Are You?”

And so he asks the question. Do you boast in the law and dishonor God by breaking it? That’s the idea. In other words, you who rely on the law, you’re breaking the law. And you’re going to find yourself in a world of trouble. Why? Obedience is required. And both Jews and Gentiles cannot supply the perfect obedience that is required in order to escape the judgment for the curse of the law.

And so we need 3:21. *“But now a righteousness of God is revealed apart from the law.”* That’s what we need, and I’ve already mentioned that.

But before that, what do others say? I realize that I’m moving along quickly. But if you have any questions or comments you can stop me. But often we hear, “I don’t care what other people think,” right? And this is kind of the response we often give.

So we’ve thought about what we think about ourselves, and who are we really? And when we get down to it, we find that okay, I’m this. And I really don’t care what others think about me. I don’t really care what others have to say. And we can be like that.

But that’s not a Biblical response, because if you look in Romans Paul is everywhere talking about doing things that we do because of the way they look to others, right? We are supposed to have a care for the look of the thing that we do, because even if what we’re doing is not necessarily wrong but has the look of being wrong, we’re going to care about that. We’re to have a care about that.

So you may not care about what they say about you, but what about God? In other words, here’s the question. Do you care about what others say about God because of what you do? You may not care about what people say about you. But do you care about what they say about God because of what you’re doing?

Now that’s really the crucial question. And that’s the one that Paul leaves them with, isn’t it? He says, *“You who boast in the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law? For as it is written: ‘The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.’”* And so what is it that you are doing that is causing others to raise the eyebrow and speak of God in such a way that is dishonoring?

And that’s the thing that we’ve got to ask ourselves continually. In other words, am I bringing dishonor to Christ by my actions? I don’t think we think enough about that frankly. In the modern church I think we think of God as this eternally loving God who is never wrathful, never concerned about sin, who will always forgive because He must and that’s what He does. And so I can do anything I want, and I have no concern about God at all. And that’s not the picture of God that the Scriptures paint of an impartial Judge who does care about His own reputation among the Gentiles. And you are His billboard. And so what they see in you is what they think about God, and God cares about that.

And so it’s an interesting thing. I realize that it leads us into a position where it’s like, whew! This kind of stinks! It leaves us on a downer. But we’re not at 3:21 yet. We’re getting into 3:21. But the point that Paul is making is this: Don’t rely on the law. And don’t think that having the law—or you can supply whatever you want into their;—don’t believe that having the law is going to get you out from the curse of the law, especially when you break the law.

Mike: Malachi really addresses that issue.

Jeff: Yeah.

Mike: Malachi 2:

“Now you priests, this warning is for you.

If you do not listen, and you do not resolve”—I like that word—

“‘If you do not resolve to honor My name,’ says the LORD Almighty,

“I will put a curse upon you,

“Who Are You?”

*And I will curse your blessings that I have already cursed,
Because you have not resolved to honor Me.’”*

Jeff: Yeah. It’s a scary thing to fall into the hands of the living God. You know, I’ll tell you this. I’ll never forget. And I can’t give you all the ins and the outs of this; I was young at the time. But my dad had a radical conversion when I was about seven or eight. And we were in church. He was made a deacon and a trustee, and all that sort of thing.

We were in a liberal church. And the liberalism of that church just kind of kept wearing away at my parents. And they ended up drifting when I was probably in my mid-teens. And they ended up going to a larger church, and they ended up hiding away.

And so I grew up in my later teens sort of hiding in a bigger church. And then I got converted. And then I got called to the ministry. And those kinds of things still didn’t really impact my parents. They continued to go to church, but it really didn’t impact them.

And then my brother got killed. And my dad came to me at one point after that. And he said this to me, and I’ll never forget it. He said, “Now I know what it’s like to fear God.”

And you know, I’ll say this. In 29 years he has never grown lukewarm or cold like they did after that episode of liberalism, because he knows as a son what it’s like to be disciplined by a Father who loves him.

Bishop: Very good.

Ted: Did he see your brother’s death as God disciplining him?

Jeff: I think at the beginning he did. And I think I’ve helped him to see that what He sent made use of a providence he can’t explain.

Ted: Sure.

Jeff: Okay, let’s pray together. Father, thanks for this day, for the time You’ve given. Lord, bless us as we go forth in it. We know that it is Your day. Bless us as we make our way through it. Lord, give us people to encounter with the gospel, even if it’s simply by the way we conduct ourselves. And Father, let us not be like the Jews who are in this particular passage. Let us remember to cast ourselves on the righteousness of God that we have in Christ apart from the law for us. And Father, when we fail we pray that we would continually cast ourselves upon Christ, knowing that in Him we have the forgiveness of our sins. Lord, bless us in Christ’s name, for we ask it in Him. Amen.

Brave Men: Amen. *(Applause)*