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Shattering False Security of Salvation (Part 1) Romans 2:17-24

Introduction:

In **1937** the great **Golden Gate Bridge** in **San Francisco, California**, was completed at a cost of **\$77 million**. It was built in **two stages**: The **first stage** went slowly and eventually ground to a halt because **23 men** fell to their **deaths** due to a **lack** of safety devices. The workmen became **paralyzed with fear** as they helplessly watched some of their companions **slip off** the structure and fall into the water below, which was comparable to hitting a **brick wall** at **85 miles** per hour. In the **second stage** of the project they **remedied** this problem by making the **largest safety net** ever built at a cost of **\$100,000** and hung it directly under the construction area. At least **10 men** slipped and fell but they were **caught** by the net and **saved** from certain death. The **security** of the net enabled the work to be accomplished **25% faster** because now the workmen felt **confident** that if they fell they wouldn't die, which **freed** them to wholeheartedly give themselves to the project.

Everyone wants to feel a sense of **security**—to be free from **danger, fear, and threat**. They want **physical** security, **national** security, **economic** security, **marital** security, **job** security, **financial** security, **home** security, and **health** security. And yet, one's sense of security in this fallen, sinful world can be **lost** in an **instant** through such things as: a dangerous situation, an enemy attack on our nation, an economic recession or depression, the loss of a spouse, the loss of a job, a financial reversal, a

home burglary, contracting a chronic or life-threatening disease, and many other ways.

However, the **most important** security that people need, but often the most neglected, is **eternal security**, whereby they know for **sure** that they are **saved** and will go to **heaven** when they die. Since the **fear of death** and what follows is **pervasive** among unbelieving mankind, people **without Christ** try to give themselves a sense of **eternal security** in various ways. **Some say** that there is no **life after death** and that at death they will simply cease to exist. **Others say** they will be reincarnated into something else. But the **majority of people** base their eternal security on some means of **works-righteousness**, in that, if they can just be a good person, live a moral life, help the needy, or be a spiritual, religious person and go to church and be baptized then they can **earn** God's favor and **merit** salvation.

But the Bible is very clear that as **eternal beings** we will all live somewhere forever and that there is only **one way** to heaven. Everything else that people **trust** in for salvation is a **false security**. This is what the apostle Paul **exposes** in the passage we will be looking at this morning.

Now having just stated in **2:1-16 six principles** of God's righteous judgment upon Jews and Gentiles alike who consider themselves to be good, moral people, Paul now focuses exclusively on the **Jews** in **2:17-3:8**. Turn with me in your Bible to **Romans 2**.

In Romans 2:17-3:8 we see four wrong assumptions of the Jews that gave them a false sense of security about their salvation and exemption from God's judgment. This morning we will be looking at only the **first two** in **2:17-24**.

The **first wrong assumption** of the Jews is this:

I. Their Heritage can Save them

A. Look at the **first part** of **v. 17**: But if **you** bear the name “**Jew...**”
(Stop there)

1. Here we see that Paul returns to the **literary style** known as “**diatribe**” that he used in **vv. 1-5**. This is where he has a **conversation** with an **imaginary opponent**, anticipates his **objections**, and then proceeds to **answer** them.
2. Now the **imaginary opponent** that he addresses as “**you**” here is explicitly identified as “**Jew,**” a **representative** of the whole Jewish race. From what Paul has just said about the **principles** of God’s righteous judgment in **vv. 1-16**, he anticipates this Jew’s saying something like this, “Come on Paul, surely God would not treat Jews the same as the Gentiles. The great **privileges** that we have been given by God not only show that He **favours** us more, but also **protects** us from His judgment.”
3. Therefore, before he begins to **shatter** the Jews false security of salvation, Paul first lists **six** of the wonderful **privileges** given to the Jews by God in **vv. 17-20**. He **agrees** that these are **real**, legitimate **privileges** as seen by the word “**if**” here in **v. 17**, which is a **first class condition** in the Greek meaning “**if, and it’s true**” or “**since.**”
4. As Paul’s states these **six privileges** to this imaginary representative Jew he is showing us **why** the Jews developed **two** of their **wrong assumptions** that gave them a false sense of security about their **salvation** and **exemption** from God’s judgment.

- B. The **first privilege** is **his heritage**. Look again at the **first part** of **v. 17** where Paul says: But **if** (or better “**since**”) you bear the name “**Jew**.”
1. The **Jews** are known as **God’s chosen people**, the descendents of **Abraham**. **Three names** have been used for them:
“**Hebrew**” is their **racial name** because of the language they spoke; “**Israel**” is their **national name** because of the land God had promised and given to them according to His covenant with Abraham; and “**Jew**” is their **religious name** because they are the covenant people of God.
 2. The word “**Jew**” (Ioudaios) literally means “one who is praised.” Originally, this was the name given to those in the tribe of **Judah** (Gen. 29:35; 49:8), one of the **twelve tribes** of **Jacob**, but **during** and **after** the **Babylonian captivity**, the name came to refer to the **whole race** that descended from **Abraham** through **Isaac**.
 3. Every **Jew** took great pride in **his** or **her name** and Abrahamic descent because it not only represented their **racial, national,** and **religious heritage**, but it also denoted their **distinction** from all other peoples of the world. Moses said to Israel in **Deuteronomy 10:15**, “Yet on your fathers did the LORD set His affection to love them, and He chose their descendants after them, even you above all peoples, as it is this day.”
 4. However, since the heritage of the Jews was their primary basis for their false security, seeing themselves as God’s favorites and automatically protected from judgment (Micah 3:11-12), Paul mentions this first. Because they were wrong!

5. **John the Baptist** addressed this very thing in **Matthew 3:7-9**:
But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance; and do not suppose that you can say to yourselves ‘We have **Abraham** for **our father**,’ for I say to you that from these **stones** God is able to **raise up** children to **Abraham.**”
6. The ***second wrong assumption*** of the Jews is this:

II. **Their Law can Save them**

- A. Look at **vv. 17-20**: (After saying “Since **you** bear the name **Jew** Paul goes on to say to this representative Jew) ...and **rely** upon the Law and **boast** in God, and **know** His will and **approve** the things that are essential, being instructed out of the Law, and are **confident** that you yourself are a **guide** to the blind, a **light** to those who are in darkness, a **corrector** of the foolish, a **teacher** of the immature, having in the **Law** the embodiment of knowledge and of the truth.
1. The **second privilege** is **his trust**. Paul says, “Since you...**rely** upon the **Law**.”
 - Here the “**Law**” refers to the **Old Testament Scriptures**. It encompassed all of God’s special revelation given to the Jews up until that time.
 - **Possessing** the gift of the very Word of God was a **superior blessing** that no other nation had (Ps. 147:19-20). It provided for them a **superior education**, for God’s Word is

the source of **spiritual refreshment, wisdom, and understanding** even today (Deut. 4:6; Ps. 19:7-11; 119).

- Now to “**rely upon**” (epanapaue) means to “rest one’s hope on.” The Jew was absolutely right to **rely on and rest in** God’s true and righteous Word, for it alone is the only **infallible standard** by which we **know** truth from error and how we are to live our lives.
2. The **third privilege is his boast**. Paul says, “Since you...**boast** in God.”
 - For the Jews to **boast in God** was a good thing. They had every right to be humbly grateful to the **one true God** and give glory and honor to Him who had graciously blessed them so much (Isa. 45:25; Jer. 9:23-24; Rom. 5:11; 15:17; 1 Cor. 1:31; 4:7; 2 Cor. 10:17; Phil. 3:3).
 3. The **fourth privilege is his knowledge**. Paul says in v. 18, “Since you...**know** His **will**.”
 - This is a reference to the **will of God**. By possessing the **Law**, God’s special revelation in the Old Testament Scriptures, the Jews not only **knew** the one true God, but they also had **knowledge** of His desires and plan.
 - Now they had **God’s perspective** on what was right and wrong, what He required and forbid, commanded and prohibited, approved and disapproved, rewarded and punished.
 - The psalmist said in **Psalm 119:105**, “Your word is a **lamp** to my feet and a **light** to my path.”

4. The **fifth privilege** is **his discernment**. Paul says, “Since you...**approve** the things that are **essential**, being **instructed** out of the Law.”

- The Jews had been continually “**instructed**” (katecheo) **orally** out of the Law as **children** in the home (i.e. catechism) and throughout their lifetime each Sabbath in the synagogues. Therefore, they were **able** to “**approve**” (dokimazeis) or **discern after testing** those things that are “**essential**” (diapheronta) or that **really matter** and are **excellent** (Matt. 23:23; Phil. 1:10).
- The psalmist goes on to say in **Psalm 119:98**, “Your commandments make me **wiser** than my enemies, for they are ever mine.”

5. The **sixth privilege** is **his ministry**. Paul says in **vv. 19-20**: Since you...“are **confident** that you yourself are a **guide** to the blind, a **light** to those who are in darkness, a **corrector** of the foolish, a **teacher** of the immature, having in the Law the **embodiment** of **knowledge** and of the **truth**.”

- Because all **Jews** had in the Law “the **embodiment**” (or repository) of divine **knowledge** and **truth**” (Ps. 119:66, 142), and was thoroughly knowledgeable of it, they in general and the **scribes** and **Pharisees** in particular, rightly considered themselves to be “**confident**” (pepoithas) or **assured** in their qualification to **minister** it to the world.
- God had given this responsibility to them. For in **Genesis 12:3** God said to **Abraham** and his descendants, “And I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will

curse. And in you **all** the **families** of the earth will be blessed.” (Gen. 22:18; Isa. 2:1-4; Mic. 4:1-4; Jn. 4:22)

- Here we see that God intended the Jews to **minister** in **four specific roles**: **First**, as “a **guide** to the **blind**.” They were to be a “**guide**” or spiritual leader to the morally and spiritually blind Gentiles (Isa. 42:7; 2 Cor. 4:4).
- **Second**, as “a **light** to those who are in **darkness**.” The Jews who themselves had been enlightened by the Law were to enlighten the Gentiles who were in spiritual darkness (Isa. 9:2; 42:6; 49:6; 58:8; 60:3; Matt. 5:14-16).
- **Third**, as “a **corrector** of the **foolish**.” The Jews were to train and discipline or bring into line the spiritually “**foolish**” or ignorant, untrained, and immature Gentiles who didn’t know the Law.
- **Fourth**, as “a **teacher** of the **immature**.” The Jews were to teach the “**immature**” or spiritually infant Gentile proselytes who needed moral and religious instruction.

6. Now although the Jews **rightly possessed** these **great** and **wonderful privileges** concerning their **heritage** and the **Law**, the mere possession of these things became the source of their security of salvation and exemption from God’s judgment. And yet, they couldn’t be more wrong!

B. Therefore, Paul lovingly proceeds to **shatter** their **false security** of salvation by **exposing** their **failure** to **live up** to the truths that they knew through **four** piercing rhetorical questions in **vv. 21-22**.

1. Look at the **first question** in **v. 21**: You, therefore, who **teach** another, **do you not teach yourself?**

2. This **lead question** contains the Jew's **central problem**—the **fact** that he did not **apply** his teaching to **himself**. In other words, the Jew didn't **practice** what he **preached**.
3. Here Paul is putting his finger on the Jews **spiritual pride** and **hypocrisy**. Although they **possessed** the law, **knew** the law, and **taught** the law to others, they didn't **live it out** in their own lives.
4. Such Jews were **typified** by the scribes and Pharisees of whom Jesus said in **Matthew 23:3**, "...for they **say** things and do not **do** them."
5. Since their lives were so **contrary** to God's Law, therefore when they made an occasional **convert** to **Judaism**, this person didn't trust in the **true God** and become **obedient** to His will, but went by the same man-made system of works-righteousness that they did.
6. Jesus said in **Matthew 23:15**, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you **travel** about 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."
7. Because of their failure to live out what they knew, the Jews were just as **spiritually blind** as those they were to **guide**. Jesus said about them in **Matthew 15:14**, "...they are **blind guides** of the blind. And if a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit." (Matt. 23:16, 17, 19, 24; Isa. 42:19; 56:10)
8. Paul then gives **three examples** of **flagrant violations** of the law as **evidence** of the Jew's failure to "**teach himself**" in the next **three questions**. The **first violation** is seen in the

second question in v. 21: You who **preach** that one shall not **steal, do you steal?**

- His point is “**Yes you do steal**” in many ways even though you **preach** against it (Isa. 56:11; Ez. 22:12; Amos 8:5; Mal. 3:8-9; Matt. 21:13; 23:14; Jn. 2:16). This is a violation of the **eighth commandment** (Ex. 20:15; Deut. 5:19).

9. The **second violation** is in the **third question in v. 22:** You who say that one should not commit **adultery, do you commit adultery?**

- Again he **exposes** that even though they teach against adultery, they commit it themselves, if not **literally** then in their **hearts** (Matt. 5:27-28). This is a violation of the **seventh commandment** (Ex. 20:14; Deut. 5:18).

10. The **third violation** is in the **fourth question in v. 22:** You who **abhor** idols, **do you rob temples?**

- Although Israel had **sinned repeatedly** against the **second commandment** in falling into **idolatry** during the period of her kings (Ex. 20:4-5; Deut. 5:8-9), since the **Babylonian captivity** the Jews never practiced that evil to any significant degree.
- However, for them to “**rob temples**” was not uncommon. This could refer to their robbing their own Temple in Jerusalem by cheating on their temple tax or some other kind of sacrilege.
- But most likely it refers to those Jews who **plundered** the gold and silver idols of the pagan temples for personal gain, which was forbidden in **Deuteronomy 7:25**. (Acts 19:37)

- **Thomas Schreiner** says it well, “Paul highlights an **inconsistency** among the Jews. They **claim** to detest idolatry and spurn any association with idols, yet they are **willing** to be defiled by profiting from the very idols that they detest.” (pg. 133)
11. Now it is important to understand that not all Jews were thieves, adulterers, and temple robbers. Paul is simply **driving home** the **point** that the Jews didn’t **practice** what they **preached**.
 12. **Douglas Moo** observes rightly, “It is not, then, that **all Jews** commit these sins, but that these sins are **representative** of the **contradiction** between **claim** and **conduct** that does **pervade** Judaism.”
- C. Paul then **sums up** these **piercing questions** (vv. 21-22) with a **pointed conclusion** in v. **23**, which can be taken either as a **question** or a **statement**: You who **boast** in the Law, through your **breaking the Law, do you dishonor** God? Or “**you do dishonor** God.”
1. Although the Jews could legitimately **boast** in the **privilege** of possessing, knowing, and teaching the Law, and in the God who gave them that Law, instead in their **arrogance** they thought the mere **possession** of it was **theirs by right** rather than by **grace**.
 2. Therefore, they were **completely satisfied** simply in **having, knowing, and teaching** it and weren’t concerned in the least about living it out in their own lives. They didn’t care that they were “**breaking the Law**” themselves!

3. The word “**breaking**” (parabaseos) here means to transgress, go aside, and step over the line. They were like a **corrupt cop** who gives the **pretense** of upholding the law but **breaks** it himself.
 4. Instead of **using** all of their **privileges** to bring **glory** and **honor** to God and **blessing** to others, by “**breaking the Law**” of God they were in fact bring “**dishonor**” to God. The word “**dishonor**” (atimazeis) here means to treat shamefully, despise, and insult.
 5. Every **sin** is first and foremost a sin **against God** (Ps. 51:4). It is to spit in His face.
 6. Now whereas every sin dishonors God, the sin of those who **claim God’s name** dishonors Him the **most** not only because they should know better, but also because of how it causes others to respond to their God.
- D. Notice how Paul then **proves** they are dishonoring God by their sin by **appealing to Scripture** in v. 24: For “**THE NAME OF GOD IS BLASPHEMED AMONG THE GENTILES BECAUSE OF YOU,**” just as it is **written**.
1. Most likely this quotation is from **Isaiah 52:5**. Some scholars have suggested that Paul cites **Ezekiel 36:20** since God’s name is **blasphemed** because of the **sin** of Israel where in the **Isaiah** passage the **blasphemy** occurs because of the **oppression** by foreign nations.
 2. However, the **Isaiah** passage is in the **larger context** (Isa. 40-66) of the people being in **exile** because of their **sin** (Isa. 40:2; 42:24-25; 43:22-28; 50:1). Therefore, Israel’s **oppression** was

the result of her **sin** and Paul rightly applies this text to the Jews of his own day.

3. Regardless, in both texts the “**name of God is blasphemed** among the Gentiles” because of the **sin of His people**. God’s “**name**” refers to His **whole Person**.
4. The sin of God’s people not only dishonors Him, but it also causes unbelievers, the very ones God wants to use us to reach, to blaspheme our God. And the word “**blasphemed**” (blasphemeitai) here means to slander, revile, scorn, mock, speak contemptuously of.
5. What a **testimony!** The **one true God**, whose **sacred name** none of these religious Jews would ever **repeat** with his lips was, because of their **sin, scorned** and **ridiculed** by the Gentiles.
6. The **sin** of God’s people causes unbelievers to **think** and **say** such things about their God as: “If that’s the kind of person they are, then their God isn’t any better;” or “He isn’t real” or “He is **powerless** since He obviously cannot help His own people.”
7. **John Murray** says it well, “The tragic irony is apparent. The Jews who **claimed** to be the **leaders** of the nations for the **worship** of the **true God** had become the instruments of **provoking** the nations to **blasphemy**. With this the **indictment** has reached its **climax**.” (pg. 85)
8. Therefore, the Jews wonderful **privileges** of their **heritage** and the **Law** cannot save them. On the contrary, their **greater** spiritual light and privilege only causes them to be more **accountable** to God and receive more **severe** punishment from Him (Jer. 25:29; Amos 3:2; Lk. 12:48).

Conclusion:

In closing, what can we as believers today **learn** from this passage? Here are **three brief things!**

First, a person's heritage or what he knows can never give him eternal security. It doesn't matter if a person is born into a Christian family, went to Christian school, owns a Bible and knows it well, has been baptized, or belongs to a church, all of these things only hold them more accountable to God. It is only by **personal faith** in Jesus Christ and **receiving** Him as **Savior** and **Lord** that anyone can have eternal security. This is God's **only way** to heaven!

Second, there is no greater **kindness** offered to another person than showing him that what he is trusting in for salvation is **false**, and then explaining to him the **true way** of salvation. For only after his **false security** is **shattered** and the **danger** of his eternal condemnation is **exposed** will the gospel of Jesus Christ appear to him as the Good News that it is.

Third, our personal testimony matters! Since we all struggle with indwelling sin until we die, we will be **hypocrites** at times, but by **God's grace** in our lives and the power of the Holy Spirit our **practice** can and should be more consistently what we **preach**. It is not enough to simply **know** the truth; we are **called** to **live out** what we know. For James 1:22 says, "But **prove** yourselves **doers** of the word, and not merely **hearers** who delude themselves." And **James** goes on to **press** this point especially to those of us who are teachers in **3:1**, saying, "Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will **incur** a **stricter** judgment." May each one of us continually ask ourselves the question, "What do people **think** about **God** from watching **my life**?"