

Romans, Part 11 6-26-22

JINOS & God's Name

Romans 2:17-24 *But if you bear the name “Jew” and rely upon the Law and boast in God,¹⁸ and know His will and approve the things that are essential, being instructed out of the Law,¹⁹ and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness,²⁰ a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of the immature, having in the Law the embodiment of knowledge and of the truth,²¹ you, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that one shall not steal, do you steal? ²²You who say that one should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? ²³You who boast in the Law, through your breaking the Law, do you dishonor God? ²⁴For “the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you,” just as it is written.*

So, take a look at our screen. Can anyone under ten tell me what this is? Yes, this is a rhinoceros, or, for short, a rhino. It is a mystery to me how no major sports teams are named for this rough-looking beast. The rhino. Now, here is another picture. What is this? Some of you know where I am going. Utah senator Mitt Romney, 2012 Republican nominee for president. Mitt has fallen out of favor with some Republicans since then and has been given the derogatory title of RINO – which stands for *Republican In Name Only*. That means they wear the label of that party but do not stand for the actual policies and positions of the party. A RINO – okay? So, then does anyone know what this is? Hmm. You may recognize this famous fellow. One of the most powerful humans in the world – it is founder and CEO of Facebook – Mark Zuckerberg. He is an example of what we might call a JINO. Any guesses what I mean by that? I mean that he is Jewish, but *Jewish In Name Only*. To my surprise, I learned, from the Urban Dictionary that this title is already out there. Our world is loaded with folks like this. JINOs. But, so too, was the very different world of the first century into which Paul sent his magnificent letter to the Romans. In the early portions of the letter – where we find ourselves still – Paul is laboring to convince his readers that each and every person stands helpless and needy before the court of heaven, having violated, knowingly and blamably, the law of a holy and righteous God. Some of his readers come from Pagan backgrounds, caught up in the peculiar sins of the Gentile world of their day. Others, are Jews, like himself. And, apparently, there were special barriers within the thinking of first century Jews that needed to be torn down, in order to make

way for the gospel of Jesus. That is why Paul goes after the Jewish miscalculations so pointedly in Romans chapter two.

I always find it fascinating when preachers tell me that we shouldn't be preaching to people about their sin because, they say, people already know they are sinners. Really!? My experience is quite different. Yes, people know they have broken a few rules, but do they normally take that seriously? It doesn't seem so to me. Few discussions ever bring up the idea of sin against God. We talk a great deal about mental health. We see the need for therapy, but not pardon. The Catholic church is known for its practice of confession, but I am told few Catholics do it anymore. I remember in Bosnia, a young Catholic man asked me if, in our church, people come to me to confess their sin. I said *no, in our church they come to me to confess the sins of others*. Sometimes. We are far more aware of the failings of others. A professor at Boston College required students to write an essay about a personal struggle over right and wrong and most could not finish the assignment because they were strangers to such a struggle. But, I am told that folks don't need to hear about sin because they already know of their need. Just tell them about grace. And yet, that was not the approach of Scripture. Definitely not Paul's approach. He labored to convince us of our deep cosmic rebellion and the terrible fate awaiting as a result – both Jew and Gentile.

Paul, of course, was a Jew. Jews of that day held to what we might call Jewish exceptionalism. They thought of the unclean, ignorant, pitiful Gentiles and they thought of themselves and their friends and family as the chosen nation, the people of God, the offspring of Abraham, who were clearly God's favorites and who may worry about many things, but not about God's disfavor and judgment. No-no-no. We are the Jews. Americans, I find, are subject to the same line of thinking, with a twist. Our nation has led the world since the great war in the 1940s and we assume we will continue to do so. The world speaks our language, loves our money, fears our military. We find a certain security in all that – although we probably should not. We have some advantages, as the Jews did, but in the final analysis we are just one more flawed nation, with flawed leaders, and a flawed culture, vulnerable to bad weather, historical shifts, international wars and conflicts within. It is more comfortable for us to just pretend that all is well – but living in reality means we quit hiding behind our ethnic or national identities.

Ripping away false security is what Romans 2 is all about. That is why it is no one's favorite chapter, but we dare not skip over it. The lesson is vital and needed, then and now - good for all of us, but maybe especially for the very religious, whether Christian or Jew. But, before we get to them (us), let's consider the non-

religious. Paul has already dealt with them in Romans one. Most everyone has developed some psychological mechanism to address fears of exposure and condemnation. So very much of what the unbeliever says and does is intended to provide some measure of protection – at least an emotional shield – against guilt and fear. John Lennon sang of it. *Imagine. Imagine there's no heaven. Imagine no hell. No religion.* He said all of that and this is precisely what unbelievers must do. Imagine. They can't face the reality of a God to whom they are accountable, especially not one who is just. So, they deny Him. They reshape Him. They tell themselves and others that it's all okay. They identify as secure and confident, but if you could see beneath their shields you would discover they are not. They hide behind their unbelief, they make reality their enemy. They live in a fantasy, but that fantasy is a flimsy shelter against the coming storm of judgment. Reality does not respect your fantasy. Judgment mocks your fantasy.

That may be where you are today. But more likely you are in a different camp – that of the religious, the believer in God. We have our own flimsy shanties. Two of the three little pigs foolishly trusted in rickety shacks, but the Jewish readers of Paul had a habit of trusting in other things that turned out to be just as flimsy. What are those things? He kind of lays them out for us. Paul writes of those who *rely upon the Law*. That means they have the Scriptures. What a gift! But if you are trusting in having them, you haven't read them well. He then says that they *boast in God and know His will and approve the things that are essential, being instructed out of the Law*. Again, this is all positive. These are no small things, but, as we saw last time, knowledge - even spiritual, Biblical knowledge is not adequate by itself. God didn't give the Jews the law just so they could know it.

But the Jew may go on to say that he does more than just know it, he teaches it to others. Okay. Verses 19-20 are about that 19-20a *Confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness,* ^{20a} *a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of the immature.* I like that line – *corrector of the foolish*. I wonder if you could make that a career. *What do you do for a living? I correct the foolish.* Most parents could make that claim. On my Facebook profile, just for fun, I added to my job title – *Fact-Checker*. That title cracks me up. How would you like to live with one of those? But some of us see this is our calling – we are here to straighten you out. You have one of these in your family? *You should appreciate us for it and pay us well.* Does Grove City offer a degree in Fact-Checking? Yet Twitter has a team of these people I gather. There to help the ignorant peons. And, in this, some find their confidence before God. We have the light, we share the light. God will surely be honored to have us in His heaven. Sadly, for these, Jesus taught in

the Sermon on the Mount, that, on judgment day, some will come to him expecting His approval because they had prophesied in His name. My dad told the Mormons who showed up at his door, that he would be fine with God because he had two sons who were preachers. But these are actually the preachers themselves and Jesus tells them to depart because he never knew them and they practiced lawlessness. Uh-oh. *My behavior is part of this?* Looks like the law was given not just to know and teach, but actually live out in my life. As a Bible-teacher myself I have always appreciated the description of Ezra in the Old Testament. Ezra 7:10 *Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the Lord and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel.* One can't forget the part about practicing the law as you strive to teach it. Religious knowledge is hardly an adequate preparation for judgment. It can, in fact, make your judgment worse. James says that those who undertake the role of teachers face a stiffer judgment.

But, there are some who do take the extra step in their homemade religion, their self-credentialing. They actually pay attention to living out the law. Paul himself, and many of his Jewish friends, would have been in this camp. They were all about keeping the details of the Jewish law. But they were deceived on three fronts. First, they thought it was their goodness that would make them acceptable to God. They missed seeing how short they were falling. They missed seeing how high was the standard. They missed seeing that God's way is the way of faith. Romans 9:30-32 *What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, attained righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith; ³¹but Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not arrive at that law. ³²Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as though it were by works.* This will be critical for the arguments in Romans 3, 4, and 5. So stay tuned for more on this point.

Secondly, Paul's Jewish compatriots were deceived in thinking that obedience was essentially outward. You say certain things, do certain things, avoid certain others and you were good. They were externalists and failed to see that true righteousness flows from a heart of love to God and love to neighbor. They were scrupulous about tithing but not about dealing with their pride, or their prejudice or their anger and lust. A major assertion of the Sermon on the Mount is that following God's commandments involves the thought life and the dispositions of the heart. And many of us have avoided murder and adultery and theft if you view only the externals, but we are consumed by anger and lust and envy.

This leads to the third way in which Paul's serious Jewish friends were deceived. They were delusional about their performance. They thought they were

doing well, but the apostle argues that they were, they are, in fact, hypocrites. In verse 21 we read 21 *You who preach that one shall not steal, do you steal?* Hmm. I haven't broken into anyone's house lately. How were these respectable religious folks stealing? This is some conjecture, but do you remember Jesus cleansing the temple? Oh yea! That was about the leaders of their religion, profiting from those who came to worship by establishing a monopoly system that provided kickbacks to the ones in charge. Not direct theft, but indirect. Micah 3:11 *Her leaders pronounce judgment for a bribe, her priests instruct for a price and her prophets divine for money. Yet they lean on the Lord saying, "Is not the Lord in our midst? Calamity will not come upon us."* False security, rooted in the self-deception that I am not a thief, when I really am.

Then Paul goes on in verse 22a *You who say that one should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery?* There were a couple of ways I think the Jewish hypocrites were doing this. First, they would commit adultery through serial monogamy. They made it too easy to dump your wife and get another. This practice Jesus said was adulterous. Their marriage vows were often not kept. Then too there is the lust issue. We adult boys are very familiar with how prevalent this is. And, I expect it was common even back then, 2000 years before the internet threw fuel on the fire.

Finally, Paul says, 22b *You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?* Idol abhorrence. Yep. If there was one thing the Jewish people got straight after their captivity in Babylon was that idolatry is not to be tolerated. But here Paul suggests they were robbing temples. Commentators differ on what this references. Were they robbing the temples of idols or of the Lord? Most likely this is about robbing pagan temples, plundering them out of a supposedly holy rage, but then profiting from the artifacts in the temple. Deuteronomy 7:25 *You must burn their idols in fire, and you must not covet the silver or gold that covers them. You must not take it or it will become a trap to you, for it is detestable to the Lord your God.* Very possibly they were violating this word.

In any case, the basic point of all this is to say that you Jewish folks, you religious ones, are not so good as you like to think. Don't go singing, "It is well, it is well, with my soul." It isn't. Your knowledge doesn't cut it. Your fact-checking doesn't cut it. Your externalistic moralizing doesn't cut it. You are a sinner in need of a Savior despite your Jewish heritage. If you read the gospels you know that Paul is not the first New Testament leader to confront this barrier among the Jews. John 8:36 *If the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.* ³⁷*I know that you are Abraham's descendants; yet you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in*

you. ³⁸*I speak the things which I have seen with My Father; therefore you also do the things which you heard from your father.*" ³⁹*They answered and said to Him, "Abraham is our father."* Jesus said to them, *"If you are Abraham's children, do the deeds of Abraham.* ⁴⁰*But as it is, you are seeking to kill Me, a man who has told you the truth, which I heard from God; this Abraham did not do.* ⁴¹*You are doing the deeds of your father.*" And then he went on to tell them that their spiritual father, the author of their value system and their affections was – well, the devil. But, they thought their ethnicity would cover them with acceptability. John the Baptist saw the same thing in his day. Matthew 3:7-9 (NLT) *When he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming to watch him baptize, he denounced them. "You brood of snakes!" he exclaimed. "Who warned you to flee the coming wrath? ⁸Prove by the way you live that you have repented of your sins and turned to God. ⁹Don't just say to each other, 'We're safe, for we are descendants of Abraham.' That means nothing.* John the Baptist sound rough, doesn't he? Not very loving. Jesus – not very loving. Paul – not very loving. Or maybe we have it wrong. Maybe just about the most loving thing you can do for someone is to extinguish their false security. This may not make you popular – but it can be loving. Undermining someone's false security in hopes of replacing it with something genuine and solid. This is precisely what is going on in Romans.

One more major thing to see from our text. Sin and righteousness – as God's word defines them – are about our orientation toward God. Sin is not primarily my offense against you – but against him. Righteousness is not about pleasing you, but about honoring Him. Back in Romans 1 we saw that the root of humanity's fall was our failure to honor God. Many of us don't think of sin rightly because we think of it in human terms, apart from God's preeminence. For most of us, humans are big and God is small, but the Bible reorients our thinking. When I was 18 and the Lord showed me how much bigger and greater he is than I had imagined, it was, for me a revolution. *You say you want a revolution?* I hope you do – in the Biblical sense. To get your world, your spiritual solar system orbiting around the King of Kings. When that happens, it becomes all about Him, all about His honor, his glory. Paul said in Philippians 1 that his goal, whether through his living or dying, was to exalt Jesus Christ. Failure, sin, is dishonoring your Lord. That's the way we must think. And the reverse – we are able, privileged, to bring honor to our Savior by our conduct. Romans 2:23 *You who boast in the Law, through your breaking the Law, do you dishonor God?* The implied answer is Yes. That is what happens, especially when you take the name of the Lord upon yourself. Maybe the most misunderstood of the ten commandments is the third about the Lord's name. We

think it is about cussing and it can be, but mostly it means that if you take the Lord's name upon yourself, when you wear his uniform and call yourself a Christian, then live contrary to his word, you dishonor him. And you erect yet another barrier to faith for those who are outside the church. 24 *For "the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you," just as it is written.*

Two examples of this from Scripture – one is the whole nation of Israel. They neglected the Lord and were summarily, sent into exile, as God promised. One result of this? Ezekiel 36:20 *When they were scattered among the nations, they brought shame on my holy name. For the nations said, 'These are the people of the Lord, but he couldn't keep them safe in his own land!' Yea. Their prosperity and morality, at one point, made the nations take notice and even envy them. But that was so yesterday. They outgrew their old devotion. They progressed to the point that they forgot God and lost his protection, thus giving fuel to the scoffers among the nations.*

Then there was David in particular. When he sinned with Bathsheba and it became a scandal, Nathan the prophet noted that he had given the Gentiles reasons to scoff. Oh my! May God spare us such a fate. Nothing seems worse to me than my choices leading others to think that Jesus does not satisfy, that Jesus is not worthy of my obedience, that Jesus in a life makes no real difference. But what do we see every year? More church leaders, more prominent evangelicals, betraying our cause, defiling our Savior's name because they could not live without a certain woman, or they had to have that mansion, or they needed the approval of the elites. And then we have our Christian celebrities, the athletes and entertainers, who tout the name of Jesus and speak of faith while living in ways that blatantly disregard his commands. As often as not, when I hear a celebrity speak of Jesus I think, *Oh no!* I wonder what they will say or do next that is detrimental to the cause of Christ. By the breaking of the law, we dishonor God and we lie to the world about who he is.

I know that I have, at times, done precisely that. And so I am reminded of me how much I need a Savior. And that is Paul's aim in all that we have read. That our spiritual defenses would be stripped and we would cry out, *Naked, I come to Thee for dress; helpless, I look to Thee for grace; foul, I to the fountain fly; wash me, Savior, or I die. Wash me Savior, or I die.*