

Lesson Six

(2:17 — 3:20)

FALSE CLAIMS

A FALSE CLAIM TO PRAISE

17 But if thou bearest the name of a Jew, and retest upon the law, and gloriest in God, 18 and knowest his will, and approvest the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law

As indicated in the last lesson, the first sixteen verses of Chapter Two are transitional as Paul moves carefully from a discussion of the Gentiles in Chapter One to words that are addressed directly to the Jew beginning at verse seventeen. The chosen people of God were proud of the name "Jew." Moses Lard thinks the phrase, "bearest the name of a Jew" is not passive, but middle voice which indicates the subject acts upon itself and should be translated, "call yourself a Jew." The word Jew comes from the word Judah which means "praise." But the Jews forgot that the praise should not flow from within themselves, nor from other men, but from God (2:29). It is obvious from the irony in Paul's pen that the Jews' confidence and self-glory rested in their genealogy, ceremony, and personal attainment. Verses 17 and 18 contain examples

of their boastings. They were proud because they had received the law. This is comparable to a man who boasts because he has a Bible in the house, though he may never read it and does not live according to its content. To know the will of God is excellent, but to boast about such knowledge is evidence one is not governed by what he knows. Hodge observes that "knowledge, when made the ground of confidence, or the fuel of pride and arrogance is perverted and destructive." To approve things that are excellent is fine if such approval issues in observable fruit. But to say and not to do has never pleased God (Cf. Matthew 15:1-9; 7:21-23; James 1:22). The Jews were wrong on two counts: their praise was grounded in self-esteem and pride and they sought the praise of men rather than the praise of God.

FALSE CLAIM TO MATURITY

19 and art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them that are in darkness, 20 a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of babes, having in the law the form of knowledge and of the truth; 21 thou therefore that teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal? 22 thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou rob temples? 23 thou who gloriest in the law, through thy transgression of the law dishonorest thou God?

The Jews were really boasting in their privileges rather than because of a proper performance of duties (verses 19-21). They thought of themselves as guides and lights. All others walked in the darkness of blindness. They claimed to be head and shoulder above others in spiritual mentality, and, therefore, to be capable teachers of all others who were merely babes in their sight. They claimed to have the "form of knowledge and of truth" but, in fact, they were like those condemned by Paul in II Timothy 3:5 who had a "form of Godliness, but . . . denied the power thereof," (see also Matthew 23:1-3). For the Jew, the law became an outward show such as the demonstrations of the scribes and Pharisees against which Jesus pronounced the "woes." Continuously Jesus attached the word "hypocrite" to His description of them (Matthew 1:13-39). An able teacher knows that he begins by teaching himself (v. 21). Paul uses concrete examples from the law and everyday life to illustrate this principle of self-teaching: You quote the law, "Thou shalt not steal" or "Thou shalt not commit adultery." How is it that you do those things which you teach others are wrong? The height of irony is reached when

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they are accused of "robbing temples" and this act is set forth as the equivalent of "idolatry," (v. 22). Numerous attempts are made by commentaries on Romans to explain how the robbing of temples could be in some sense the same as participating in idolatry. Some seek to explain the analogy literally, suggesting that Jews went into temples and stole idols made of gold and silver and perhaps took other valuable articles as well. Although such robberies did occur (Acts 19:37), thievery is not the point here as it is in verse 21. It is unlikely that Paul is criticizing a withholding of the temple tax in Jerusalem as some suggest. The leaders of the Jews, if not the common man, seem to have been meticulous about the performance of such things (Matthew 18:12; 23:23). Bruce thinks this criticism by Paul may have some application to a situation like that of the Jews who influenced a very wealthy lady to give a large sum of money for the temple which was used personally by the Jews. Probably the best way to understand this climactic statement of sarcasm against the Jews is in a figurative sense. For example, Colossians 3:5 speaks of covetousness as an expression of idolatry. Covetousness involves strong desire. When one desires anything above his desire to do the will of God, it becomes a form of idolatry. The Pharisees desired greatly the praise of men (Matthew 23:5-12). Accepting personally praise and honor which is due unto God is an idolatrous act. Isaiah Grubbs says, "Irreverent disregard for holy things" or "any form of sacrilege" would fall into this classification of idolatry. Or as another paraphrases Paul's words, "You profess great reverence for God in eschewing idolatry; and yet, in other forms, you are guilty of the greatest irreverence." Verse twenty-three is continued irony. They did not really glory in the law, but rather boasted because God had given it to them. Their satisfaction did not stem from obedient lives but from loud professions and spectacular demonstrations. Boasting about the law was the equivalent of the display of wide borders on their garments, enlarged phylacteries, and standing on the street corner to pray so that they might be heard of men.

FALSE PROFESSIONS NOT PRACTICED

24 For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you, even as it is written. 25 For circumcision indeed profiteth, if thou be a doer of the law: but if thou be a transgressor of the law, thy circumcision is become uncircumcision. 26 If therefore the uncircumcision keep the ordinances of the law, shall not his uncircumcision be reckoned for circumcision? 27 and shall not the uncircumcision which is by nature, if it fulfil the law, judge thee, who

with the letter and circumcision art a transgressor of the law? 28 For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh; 29 but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.

The result of all of this sham was that the name of God was blasphemed among the heathen (v. 24). Paul suggests that this kind of hypocrisy was foreseen by the Lord and predicted. "As it is written" (v. 24) probably refers to the content of Isaiah 52:5, but it may have reference to other portions of the writings of the prophets as well. For example Amos 3:9, 10; 4:4, 5 are ironic, "tongue in cheek" passages in which the prophet invites God's people to come to the pagan centers of worship in Mount Samaria, Bethel, or Gilgal where they can practice idolatry and multiply their transgressions. The history of Israel during the time of captivity is very similar (Ezekiel 36:21, ff.).

Looking at our day we must confess that it is sad when the name of the Lord Jesus Christ is blasphemed and the church of Jesus Christ loses her reputation because of the way professing Christians act.

Paul levels one more criticism at his own beloved people whose lives were not commensurate with their profession of faith and whose ceremonial practices had become empty and vain. It is a lesson concerning true circumcision which Paul adds. Circumcision of the flesh is meaningless unless the heart is right. No outward form or ceremony has ever had validity apart from faith and obedience from the heart. The Scriptures, Old as well as New, state this general truth repeatedly and circumcision is the specific example (Deuteronomy 10:16; Jeremiah 4:4; 9:25, 26; Ezekiel 44:6, 7; Acts 7:51; Philippians 3:3; Galatians 6:14-16). Careless, willful disobedience of the law made circumcision for the Jews as if it had never occurred. It must have inflamed the Jewish emotions to read that an uncircumcised Gentile who fulfills the law is a judge of the Jew. It is not likely that Paul is suggesting that Gentiles shall at some future day sit as judges and Israelites will pass before them to receive judgment. Rather it is a judgment like the sinful person feels who is ill at ease while in the company of a righteous person. It is not necessarily a verbal exchange which makes the sinner uncomfortable, but the righteousness of the one automatically and silently condemns the other and such condemnation is resented. Such resentment must have run high in a Jew at the very thought of an uncircumcised Gentile judging him. *Jews, in ancestry only, but not in heart, are like Americans who deny all for which America has stood and which made her a great nation. They are Americans in legal citizenship, but they are not true Americans in heart. The church rolls are filled with the names of such*

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members. They profess to be members of the church but their hearts are not in that membership. The non-Christian world stands by in judgment. The true Jew, like the true Christian, is one whose religious and ceremonial acts are not performed just to be seen of men but to receive the plaudits of God (v. 29). All of this discussion about the "heart-Jew" as distinct from the "external Jew" is a prelude to the argument that comes later in Romans (Chapters 9-11) in which Paul claims that there is an Israel within Israel. The inner Israel is the remnant of the nation of those called to be God's own possession. They are the true spiritual Israel.

FALSE ARGUMENTS

3:1 What advantage then hath the Jew? or what is the profit of circumcision? 2 Much every way: first of all, that they were intrusted with the oracles of God. 3 For what if some were without faith? shall their want of faith make of none effect the faithfulness of God? 4 God forbid; yea, let God be found true, but every man a liar; as it is written, That thou mightest be justified in thy words, And mightest prevail when thou comest into judgment. 5 But if our unrighteousness commendeth the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unrighteous who visiteth with wrath? (I speak after the manner of men.) 6 God forbid: for then how shall God judge the world? 7 But if the truth of God through my lie abounded unto his glory, why am I also still judged as a sinner? 8 and why not (as we are slanderously reported, and as some affirm that we say), Let us do evil, that good may come? whose condemnation is just.

As would be expected, such a critical attack raised a number of questions in Jewish minds. Paul was way ahead of his readers. He anticipated their arguments, stated their questions, and answered them. The opening section of Chapter Three is closely connected to what has been said in Chapter Two. The Jewish reader would conclude upon reading Chapter Two that Paul had proved too much. Is the Jew condemned just like the Gentile? If that be true, then what is the meaning of God's call, promises, covenants and all the dealings of God with the Jewish nation? Doesn't the Jew have any advantage whatsoever, and why should a Jew bother to be circumcised at all? In the light of all that Paul had just written, one would expect him to come right back with a negative answer: No, the Jew does not have any advantage. On the contrary, however, Paul affirms that the Jews are a greatly advantaged people and the number one advantage was the blessing of having received divine revelation which Paul calls "the oracles of God." (For a

large section of study on *logia*, the word translated "oracles" see *Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, Benjamin Warfield, pages 351-407). Some criticize Paul as being like the modern public speaker who intends to enumerate a number of things when he says, "first of all" and then forgets to add succeeding numbers. It is not Paul's intention to enumerate many advantages. He says they have many and chiefly, right at the head of the list, above all others, the prime advantage is that of being recipients of the Word of God. The Jews, however, were not to construe this blessing to mean that they were exempt from the judgment of God nor that they were the sole objects of God's love. They were the elect, but as with the church, judgment is to begin at the house of God (Ezekiel 9:6; 1 Peter 4:17). The Jews needed to be aware of what has been called "the peril of privilege." The person who grows up in a Christian home is a privileged person. But attendant with every privilege is responsibility. It is a privilege to study God's word in a Bible college or a seminary, but tremendous responsibility is attached to such a privilege. It is exceedingly dangerous not to fulfill obligations which accrue to one who is greatly privileged. The Jew of Paul's day stood under the "peril of privilege."

Paul moves quickly to the next question which he had foreseen in the mind of his readers (vv. 3, 4). If some of the Jews did not believe and were not faithful to God, does that mean that God would respond in kind and not be faithful to keep His promises to His chosen people? The answer begins with a strong negative which may properly be called an ejaculation. This forceful expression appears a number of times in Romans. The phrase is translated "God forbid" but that is an attempt by translators to put into English some of the force of Paul's Greek. Neither the word "God" nor the word "forbid" are in the Greek. Some try to reflect a more literal meaning by translating, "let it never be" or "don't conceive of such a thought." So Paul is saying, "Don't think like that" because God has always been found faithful and true in all things and every man may on occasion be a liar. The apostle uses Psalm 51:4 to figuratively represent God in human circumstances as if God could be brought into a courtroom where His word would be tried and found to be true (v. 4). In that penitential Psalm of David, it is evident that David knew his own sin stood out in stark contrast to the righteousness of God.

The idea of contrast of man's sin with God's righteousness led Paul to state a third question which is basically, if by contrast the sinfulness of man makes the righteousness of God more clearly visible, why should God condemn men when they sin? Here is another example of Paul's thought pattern in which he argues from the general to the specific. His general term is "unrighteousness" and the specific example is "lie."

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Does my lie make the truthfulness of God more clearly seen? Can my blackness make God appear more white? Does the end justify the means? The answer of Paul to this question is that if such reasoning was valid, there could be no final judgment (v. 6). He has already set forth, with absolute certainty, the fact that God will judge every man. There is no need for further support of that which has already been established (2:6, 16). The idea that God is unrighteous when he holds man accountable for sin (v. 5), is about as ludicrous as suggesting that a criminal would be correct in turning to the judge in a courtroom, to say, "Now Judge, don't you condemn or punish me for my crime. If you do, it will show how you are lacking in character." Some people were saying Paul taught that evil works should be done because they would in some way produce good. Inasmuch as Paul labels such teaching as "slander," (v. 8), it is likely that the disseminators of the erroneous information knew that Paul did not so teach. At any rate, whatever the motive of those who spoke falsely, they were worthy of condemnation (v. 8).

SUMMARY TESTIMONY FROM SCRIPTURE

9 What then? are we better than they? No, in no wise: for we before laid to the charge both of Jews and Greeks, that they are all under sin; 10 as it is written, There is none righteous, no not one; 11 There is none that understandeth, There is none that seeketh after God; 12 They have all turned aside, they are together become unprofitable; There is none that doeth good, no, not so much as one: 13 Their throat is an open sepulchre; With their tongues they have used deceit: The poison of asps is under their lips: 14 Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: 15 Their feet are swift to shed blood; 16 Destruction and misery are in their ways; 17 And the way of peace have they not known: 18 There is no fear of God before their eyes. 19 Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it speaketh to them that are under the law; that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may be brought under the judgment of God: 20 because by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified in his sight; for through the law cometh the knowledge of sin.

The conclusion of this entire discussion about the relationship of the Jew to God and to the Gentiles is found in verses 9-20. The question is put concisely, "Are we (Jews) better than they (Gentiles)?" The answer is just as concise, "No, in no way!" Old Testament testimony from Psalms and Isaiah is introduced as evidence that both Jew and Gentile are sinners. There is not one person whose character is not blemished

by sin, (vv. 10-12). These verses should not be used to support the doctrine of the "total depravity" of man. To do so is to say more than the Apostle affirms. Much more will be said about the character of man in the lesson which deals with Romans 5:12. Because man does not possess a righteous character, it follows naturally that his speech would reflect that weakness (vv. 13, 14) and his actions would be sinful (vv. 15-17). The basic cause of man's condition is not that Adam sinned, but rather because "There is no fear of God before their eyes," (v. 19). Here is the crux of the matter. "The fear of Jehovah is the beginning of knowledge; But the foolish despise wisdom and instruction" (Proverbs 1:7). Paul is determined not to allow his own countrymen to wiggle out of a personal application of the numerous passages quoted from the Old Testament. "Now we know," he says pointedly, "that the law speaks to them that are under the law," (v. 19) and the "law brings the knowledge of sin," (v. 20). The Jews bragged because God had given His oracles to them. Now they are faced with the truth that they have no immunity from the application of those Scriptures. "Every mouth is stopped!" "All are brought under the judgment of God," including the Jew who wanted all of God's blessings but little or none of the responsibility and obligation attached to those blessings.

READER'S REVIEW:

1. What is the meaning of the name Jew?
2. What was the basis of the Jews' self-confidence and self-glory?
3. List some of the false claims to maturity of which Paul accuses the Jews.
4. State three possible explanations of Paul's accusation that the Jews rob temples. Which do you think to be best? Why?
5. What is it that must accompany any religious practice for that ceremony to have acceptance with God?
6. What practices and customs of the leaders of the Jews were condemned by Jesus as being hypocritical?
7. How do you understand Paul's statement that Gentiles will judge Jews?
8. State some current illustrations that are comparable to Paul's evaluation of the Jews to be Jews in ancestry only but not in heart.
9. What is Paul's answer to those who would ask, "What advantage does a Jew have?"
10. How does Paul answer those who want to know if God will respond to a faithless people by not keeping His promises to them?

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11. What is the response of Paul to those who would argue, "If my sin makes God's righteousness stand out more clearly, why should He condemn me?"
12. From which Old Testament books does Paul quote to support his contention that Jews are no better than Gentiles, but that all have sinned?
13. In what areas of life do the Old Testament quotations show all men to be lacking in moral quality?
14. What is the basic reason for man's sinful condition?
15. List three things which are said to be accomplished by the law (vv. 19, 20).
16. What is the one thing specified which the law does not do?