

Romans – Gospel of God Exalted

Facilitated by Sister Patricia Weaver

September 14, 2023

Memory Verse

Romans 8:38–39 (NIV) (Choose your favorite translation)

³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 2:17–20 (NLT)

¹⁷ You who call yourselves Jews are relying on God's law, and you boast about your special relationship with him. ¹⁸ You know what he wants; you know what is right because you have been taught his law. ¹⁹ You are convinced that you are a guide for the blind and a light for people who are lost in darkness. ²⁰ You think you can instruct the ignorant and teach children the ways of God. For you are certain that God's law gives you complete knowledge and truth.

False Security

People long for economic security, job security, marital security, national security, health security, home security, security of social position, and many other kinds of security. It is the natural impulse of self-preservation to want security. Yet, despite the claims of independence and self-sufficiency that many people make, they know instinctively that, in themselves, they are not completely secure. Amen!

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POINT 1 -THE FALSE SECURITY OF HERITAGE

But if you bear the name “Jew,” (2:17a) NASB

The chosen people of God took great pride in the name **Jew**. In centuries past they had been referred to as Hebrews, so called because of the language they spoke. They also had long been called Israelites, after the land God had promised and given to them according to His covenant with Abraham. But by the time of Christ, the most common name they had was that of Jew. The term was derived from Judah, the name of one of the twelve tribes as well as the name of the southern kingdom after the division following Solomon’s death. But during and after the Babylonian captivity, it had come to refer to the whole race that descended from Abraham through Isaac.

The name represented both their racial and religious heritage, and in their own minds it denoted their distinctiveness from all other peoples of the world. Despite the bondage and oppression they had suffered at the hands of Gentiles for hundreds of years, and were presently still suffering, they wore the name **Jew** as a badge of great honor and pride. The name marked them off as the unique and specially favored people of God. The root meaning of *Judah*, and therefore of **Jew**, is “*praised*,” and the Jews of Paul’s day considered that to be a well-deserved title and description of themselves.

Jews had long since lost sight of the purpose of their unique divine calling, that was to be the channel through which “*all the families of the earth shall be blessed*” (**Gen. 12:3**). They had no desire to share their God-given truths and blessings with the rest of the world, much less be used by the Lord as the means through which He would draw all nations to Himself. Jonah’s reluctance to preach in Nineveh

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because he feared they would believe in God and be spared judgment (Jonah 4:2) typified the attitude of many Jews toward Gentiles.

Instead of viewing those divine truths and blessings as a trust from a gracious and forgiving God, they viewed them as their right by merit. They believed they were specially blessed not because of God's grace but because of their own goodness. They felt superior and proud. Instead of boasting in their great God and in His gracious revelation of Himself to them, they boasted in their own supposed greatness for having received it.

Pride in their being the chosen people of God made some Jews absolutely blind to reality, not only religiously but politically. On one occasion when Jesus was teaching "those Jews who had believed Him," He said, "If you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (**John 8:31–32**). When some of the unbelieving Jewish leaders heard those words, they were greatly offended. They were so self-deluded about their superiority and independence that they retorted, "We are Abraham's offspring, and have never yet been enslaved to anyone; how is it that You say, 'You shall become free' " (**v. 33**). As the Lord explained, they completely missed His point. "Truly, truly, I say to you," He said, "everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin" (**v. 34**).

Jesus utterly undermined the Jews' imagined security of racial and religious heritage. In a similar way, countless people since the time of Christ have considered themselves safe from God's judgment simply because they have been born into a Christian family or have been baptized or belong to a church.

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According to Scripture, however, a person who is raised in a Christian home and trained in a Christian environment is not saved by such a heritage, valuable as it is. Nor does baptism, or any other Christian rite in itself, possess or bestow any spiritual benefit. Apart from true faith held by the person receiving it, no ritual or ceremony has any spiritual value whatsoever.

Discussion Questions

1. What stands out to you in this portion of our lesson?
2. We who claim to be Christians, do we live up to this name? Just do a self-examination. What are some things to consider?

POINT 2 -THE FALSE SECURITY OF KNOWLEDGE

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, (2:17b–18)

Taken by itself, this statement by Paul might seem to have been a commendation. But as he soon makes clear (vv. 21–25), it was a strong indictment, because the Jews did not live up to the **Law** they knew so well and praised so highly. Most Jews of that day were proud and self-righteous about their heritage and had come to **rely upon** their knowledge of **the Law and** their boasting **in God** as means of satisfying the Lord. They loved to recite such passages as, “[God] ¹⁹ has revealed his words to Jacob, his decrees and regulations to Israel. ²⁰ He has not done this for any other nation; they do not know his regulations. **(Ps. 147:19–20)**. But since it was impossible for anyone to keep all of God’s law perfectly, some of the rabbis began teaching that merely *learning* the facts of the **Law** was sufficient to please God. Weakening the purpose of the law still further, some taught that the mere *possession* of it, in the

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form of written scrolls, was sufficient. Still others taught that Jews were safe from God's judgment simply because, as a people, they were the chosen *recipients and custodians* of God's **Law**.

When ungodly Jews would **boast in God** it was really a means of boasting in themselves, in the unique privileges and blessings they thought were theirs by right rather than by grace.

Self-righteous, presumptuous Jews were satisfied simply to **know His will**, without obeying it. They knew what God required and what He forbade, what He commanded and what He prohibited, what He approved and what He disapproved, what He rewarded and what He punished. But rather than saving them, that knowledge became a judgment against them, because they refused to live by it and refused to accept the remedy for such failure.

They were also willing to **approve the things that are essential**. **Approve** carried the idea of testing in order to prove the value of something, such as precious metals. In other words, the Jews had the means not only to know what was right and wrong but to discern what the most important part of God's law was.

Jews were also continually **being instructed out of the Law**. Being instructed is the term from which *catechism* is derived. It had the general meaning of oral instruction of any sort but was especially associated with teaching by repetition. Both at home and in the synagogues, Jewish boys in particular were systematically and thoroughly **instructed out of the Law**. Not only rabbis but also many other Jewish men memorized large portions of the Old Testament, which they often recited in public as a demonstration of piety.

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It is ironic that ancient Jews considered wisdom to consist of acting according to the knowledge one had, whereas the ancient Greeks simply equated wisdom with knowledge. By New Testament times, however, many Jews, especially the religious leaders, had, in practice, accepted the Greek view of wisdom. Whether they did so intentionally or not, the consequence was that they felt content with merely knowing God's law and had little desire or motivation to obey it. They knew much but obeyed little.

WHAT THEY TAUGHT ABOUT 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, (2:19–20)

The Jews not only felt secure in what they knew but also in what they taught. Considering themselves to be the most religiously wise, they naturally thought themselves to be the most competent teachers of the spiritually unwise, namely the Gentiles, who did not have the benefit of God's written revelation.

But Israel's continued unfaithfulness to God and disobedience of His Word disqualified her as an example and teacher to the unenlightened Gentiles. And when Jews made an occasional convert to Judaism, they made him worse off than he was before. "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites," Jesus said, "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" (**Matt. 23:15**). Instead of leading Gentiles to trust in the true God and become obedient to His will, the Jewish leaders engulfed converts in the vast rabbinical system of man-made, legalistic traditions.

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In Romans 2:19–20, Paul mentions four specific areas in which many Jews considered themselves to be spiritually superior teachers.

First, Paul said, “You **are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind.**” Jews in general, and the scribes and Pharisees in particular, considered themselves to be superior mentors of the community in spiritual and moral matters. They saw themselves as religious guides to their unlearned Jewish brethren and especially to the spiritually **blind** Gentile pagans. But because of their arrogant pride and blatant hypocrisy, Jesus charged them with being “blind guides” (**see Matt. 23:24–28**). Far from being qualified to guide others, they were themselves in desperate need of guidance.

Second, Paul notes that most Jews considered themselves to be **a light to those who are in darkness**. Actually that was precisely the role God had intended for Israel. He had called His people to be a spiritual light to the Gentiles (Isa. 42:6). As noted above, it was through them that “all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (**Gen. 12:3**).

Jesus declares His disciples to be “the light of the world” and charges them to put their light on a lampstand, where it can be seen and will do some good. “Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven,” He said (**Matt. 5:14–16**). That has always been God’s intention for His people. He gives them light not only for their own spiritual benefit but also for the spiritual benefit of the rest of the world, before whom they are His witnesses.

Third, the self-righteous Jew prided himself as being **a corrector of the foolish**. Again the primary focus was on the Gentiles, even the wisest of whom most Jews considered to be **foolish** in the area of religion.

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Fourth, the self-righteous Jew thought of himself as **a teacher of the immature**. The idea is that of teaching very small children, in this case, children in the Jewish faith. In light of the context, it is likely that the term **immature** here represents Gentile proselytes to Judaism, who needed special instruction. They not only needed to learn God’s law but also needed to rid themselves of the many pagan ideas and practices in which they had been brought up.

Through God’s unique revelation of Himself and of His will to Israel, Jews had **in the Law the embodiment of knowledge and of the truth**. Embodiment has the basic meaning of an outline or sketch. It therefore seems better to translate the word here as “semblance” or “appearance,” because throughout this passage Paul emphasizes the religious superficiality of most of the Jews of his day. He uses the same word in **2 Timothy 3:5**, where he warns of men in the last days who will hold “a form of godliness, although they will have denied its power.” In both passages the idea of counterfeit is implied.

The Jews did indeed through **the Law** have the revelation of divine **knowledge and ... truth**, but their understanding, teaching, and exemplifying of it had become so encrusted with Jewish tradition that God’s true **Law** was generally unknown and disregarded.

Discussion Questions

1. **What stands out to you in this portion of our lesson?**
2. **In what ways does Paul point to hypocrisy?**

Close In Prayer