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A1430 – July 27, 2014 -- Romnd 2:17-24

The Jew And The Law

Today we move to the Jew. What is Paul showing in Romans 1:18-3:21? That all men are condemned; that there is none righteous; no not one. Romans is huge on the issue of righteousness or lack thereof. God is righteous and the lack of righteousness before God is man's fundamental problem. Because of it he stands condemned. But God is gracious and He has reached out to man by various modes and means of revelation and yet man has not been receptive of His revelation. He has reached out to pagan Gentiles the world over through creation and they knew God through creation but they suppressed this truth in unrighteousness. He has reached out to moral Gentiles the world over through conscience and they knew God through conscience but they seared their conscience by doing the very things their conscience condemned. And today we see that God has reached out to Jews through the Law and the Jews knew God through the Law, yet they did not follow the Law but were hypocritical and therefore they too are condemned. So all are condemned; that is Paul's message in Romans 1:18-3:21; there is none righteous; no not one.

Romans 2:17 starts off the section that condemns Jews. Before we rush in to the section on Jews, who's a Jew? Paul says, **But if you bear the name Jew...**so we need to know how the Scripture defines a Jew? There are about twenty definitions of a Jew these days but only one of them is the biblical definition. The word **Jew** comes from the Hebrew "Judah" which means "praise". Judah was one of the twelve sons of Israel. That gives a little background. However, just considering what we've seen in Romans 1:18-2:16 what is a Jew? Not a Gentile. Paul's been talking about Gentiles for 34 verses and in 2:17 he shifts to address Jews. So there are Gentiles and there are Jews. We should also be able to tell that just because someone is a believer it doesn't make them a Jew. How do we know that? Because we're in the section

on condemnation. Gentiles are condemned and now he's saying Jews are condemned. So there is such a thing as a Jew who is an unbeliever. Whether you are a Jew or Gentile is totally unrelated to whether you're a believer or not. Now both these terms are national designations. And if you can define the nation of the Jews then you can easily define the Gentiles because they're the non-Jewish nations.

So who is a Jew? A Jew is a racial descendant of Jacob. There was Abraham and he was given the covenantal promises, then he had Ishmael and Isaac and Isaac was given the covenantal promises, then Isaac had Esau and Jacob and Jacob was given the covenantal promises. Jacob was then re-named Israel and he became the father of the twelve tribes. A Jew is a physical descendant of one of the twelve tribes of Israel. So the only way you can be a Jew is to be born a Jew; you have to be a physical descendant of one of the twelve tribes of Israel. There is no other way to be or become a Jew. Now the way it's determined is if your father was a Jew. The mother doesn't matter; she can be a Moabite like Ruth or a Canaanite like Rahab, both those girls married Jewish men and therefore their children were 100% Jewish. So as long as the father is a Jew then whether the mother is Jewish or Gentile it doesn't matter, the kids are 100% Jews. So putting this all together, a Jew is a physical descendant of Jacob to whom the covenant promises went and who was renamed Israel. You are either born a Jew or a Gentile and nothing you do after that can change whether you are a Jew or a Gentile. In other words, believing in Jesus Christ doesn't make you a Jew. Believing in Jesus Christ makes you a child of God, but not a Jew. Now jumping ahead a bit we will see in Rom 2:28-29 and 9:6 that the Jews who have not believed in Jesus Christ are not complete Jews, meaning they are only physical Jews, they're not spiritual Jews. So when a Jew has faith in Jesus as the Messiah His Jewishness is completed in the sense that his Jewishness has met the intended aim of faith which results in a circumcised heart. So there are passages that refer to a completed Jew as one who is a physical Jew who has had faith and people sometimes get confused on those passages and think that we Gentiles become Jews when we have faith. Nonsense. A Gentile can in no way become a Jew. When a Gentile has faith he remains a Gentile. Now interestingly we do become children of Abraham but to be a Jew you have to be a child of Jacob, and besides, the child relationship we have with Abraham is not as a physical child but as a spiritual child in the sense that we had faith as Abraham had faith. So we are children of Abraham but we are not

Jews. Jew is a term that is racial and refers to being physically born of one of the twelve tribes of the man named Jacob who was renamed Israel and within that group there are true or complete Jews, those who have faith. But all of these compose the Jewish nation which is distinction from all the Gentile nations.

Now that we've defined Jews and Gentiles which of the groups would you least expect to be condemned? The Jews! If any group of people considered themselves not condemned it was the Jews. They were on a track of earning righteousness with God! How could they be condemned? Three NT passages confirm the fact that Jews considered themselves to be on a track of gaining righteousness with God and that they were not sinful like the Gentiles (Gal 2:15; Luke 24:7; Acts 2:23). I'll take you to one of these passages, Galatians 2:15. What's the context? Paul is denouncing Peter for separating from the Gentiles in the dining hall at Galatia. Peter was making food an issue and the implication was that Gentile believers needed to follow the dietary regulations of the Mosaic Law in order to be acceptable with God. Peter was trying to put them under the yoke of the Law. In that context Paul says in verse 15, "We are Jews by nature and not sinners from among the Gentiles;" Now what he means by "we are Jews by nature" is that we are Jews by birth. And what happened to a Jew at birth? They were taken down to the Tempel on the eighth day and circumcised. The circumcision brought the baby into the bond of the Mosaic Covenant. The baby was then expected to live in terms of the Mosaic Law. Were Gentiles typically circumcised? No. So they were not brought into the bond of the Mosaic Covenant. They were sinners, meaning here - outside the Mosaic Covenant. And this was the common belief among the Jews; we're circumcised, we're under the Law, we're therefore set on a course of righteousness; Gentiles are not, they're sinners. That belief was entirely erroneous of course. Verse 17 goes on to show that while Jews were seeking to be justified they were found to be sinners as well. Therefore justification is through faith alone for both Jews and Gentiles, never is it by doing the works of the Law. But the point is that the common belief among Jews was that because they were in the bond of the Law they were on a track of earning their justification by doing the works of the Law and only Gentiles were condemned sinners.

So what does Paul begin to do in Romans 2:17? He begins to completely demolish that outlook. And it's fascinating the way Paul has led up to this.

He started with pagan Gentiles. Is it to be expected that pagan Gentiles are condemned? That's a no-brainer. Then he moved to moral Gentiles. Is it expected that moral Gentiles are condemned? Maybe. They do some good. But then he brings up the Jews. Is this expected? Not at all. This is utterly unexpected and you should sense Paul's argument climaxing at this point. It's the same climactic approach that Amos used in condemning Israel and Judah. He started condemning the surrounding Gentile nations. Was that expected? Sure, absolutely. They're nasty Gentiles; dogs set for judgment; Syria, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, Moab and then boom, Amos condemns Judah and Israel. He just dropped a nuclear bomb on them out of mid-air. It's the same thing here. This would be totally unexpected by a Jew reading Romans 1-3. How can a Jew who had so much revelation be condemned along with Gentiles? Give me a break. We have the Law. So Paul sets out here to prove that even Jews are condemned and the basis of their condemnation is their Law.

2:17, **But if you bear the name "Jew"** begins the first of ten privileges or advantages that Jews had over Gentiles. Were there Jews in Rome? Yes. Lots of Jews in Rome. Rome was culturally and ethnically diverse. This letter was written to Jewish and Gentile believers in Rome but since it is an exposition of the gospel then Jewish believers could use this material to show Jewish unbelievers that they were in fact condemned. Surely they knew many who bore **the name "Jew,"** which is the first advantage, **and rely upon the Law,** the second advantage. The Greek word **rely** means "to rest," "to find security in something." The Jew did find security in the Law. He felt it gave him a superior standing before God. Think of all the nations on earth and how many were given their national constitution directly by God? How many nations? One nation. Israel. The third advantage of the Jew, **and boast in God.** Why did the Jews boast in God? Because Deut 4 and 7 say that God chose Israel alone of all the nations and He just allowed all the other nations to go their own way, worshipping the sun, the moon and the stars. But not Israel. He chose Israel for Himself that they might worship Him, the one true God. So they did have God in a special sense that other nations didn't have Him. They boasted in Him as a national asset. "We're the nation Israel, we have God and you Gentiles, you don't have God." And that was true. It was absolutely true. But were they supposed to boast about it? What were they supposed to do? Be humble and recognize that God's choice of them was due to His mercy and because He chose them they had a responsibility to Him to

be a light to the Gentiles and share with them the mercies of the one true God. But instead of becoming a light what did they become? Conceited and arrogant. They totally separated from the Gentiles and referred to them as dogs; there was a very strict wall of hostility between Jew and Gentile. Ephesians deals with the breaking down of that hostility in Christ. But it's that same attitude that Israel had toward the Gentiles that some in the Church have toward the world. They say, "We are the elect and they are the pagans" and they get on a high horse about it. Is that the right attitude? No. They're supposed to recognize God's mercy toward them and extend that mercy through the gospel to others. Verse 18 is the fourth advantage of the Jew, **and know His will**. Where would the Jew find God's **will**? In the OT word of God. The will of God is always found in the word of God. You don't go interpreting every circumstance as indicative of the will of God. The way you interpret your circumstances is not subjective. You go to the word of God and you find the will of God. The Jew went to the OT word of God, especially to the Law. The Law explained God's will for the life of the nation Israel. They knew what God's plan was for them as outlined in Scripture. But that's not all, the fifth characteristic is, **and approve the things that are essential**. That's a translation that could be improved on. What it really says is **and to approve the things that excel in value**. In other words, they knew the Law was valuable, they aren't assigning value here. What they are doing, after carefully studying the Law is expressing an appreciation of the value. They concluded that it was indeed the document that excels in value far beyond any other document. They recognized that the OT law was superior to any other Law. It was superior to the Laws of Eshnuna, the Code of Hammurabi and other ancient law codes. The sixth advantage of the Jew, **being instructed out of the Law**. And what did being instructed out of the Law give the Jew? Knowledge of God. God is holy and the Law is an exposition of His holiness. What else did it give the Jew? Moral discernment. Shedd says, "The Jews ethical discernment was the fruit of catechetical and synagogical instruction in the Old Testament."¹ The Jews placed an enormously high value on being instructed; far higher than most Christians. Synagogue was essentially instruction. There was accompanying ritual but the chief thing was instruction. For the Jew, the Messianic Jew, Alfred Edersheim said they considered instruction from the Law to be the highest and most valuable thing in the entire world. All the greatest Rabbi's got to marry the most beautiful women. That's because they put the value of the knowledge of God that Gentiles put on celebrities. The highest calling among

the Jews was to know God. That's the sixth advantage that the Jew has over the Gentile. Verse 19, the seventh advantage, **and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind.** Who are the blind? The Gentiles. Gentiles are blind. They didn't have the Law. God left them out there and they got a little bit here, a little bit there but nothing like the Jew. So the Jew was to be a guide to the Gentile, meaning his role was to lead the Gentiles to salvation. Van Til quipped that the unbeliever is like a man wandering about in the darkest of nights looking for a black horse that isn't there and he is blind. That's what Gentiles are, darkened in mind, blind in moral compass. The Jews were to lead the blind to salvation. And many of them were confident that they were guides to the blind. Remember in the gospels how the Pharisees would boast in winning proselytes to Judaism? They were convinced that they were guides to the blind but it turned out they were blind themselves. Also in verse 19, the eighth advantage of the Jew, **a light to those who are in darkness.** Again, who is in **darkness?** The Gentiles. They were in darkness because they were left without the special revelation of God held in the Holy Scriptures. It was to the Jews that the oracles of God were entrusted. Jews were therefore to be a **light to** the Gentiles, to introduce them to the Scriptures and to the Scriptures Messiah. Verse 20, a ninth advantage of the Jew, he was **a corrector of the foolish, the foolish** being an epithet for who? The Gentiles. Jews judged Gentiles as **foolish,** meaning they lacked good judgment and it was hard to argue they were wrong. Gentiles are foolish in judgment and that is simply because of their lack of exposure to the wisdom of God in Scripture. So the Jews were to correct the foolishness of Gentiles, lead them to wisdom. The tenth advantage of the Jew, **a teacher of the immature.** Who are the immature? The **immature** are babes in Judaism, they were proselytes to Judaism who were the closest to Judaism that a Gentile could be. He became a proselyte by committing himself to Judaism and undergoing voluntary circumcision. The Gentile God-fearer was distinct in that he did not undergo circumcision and was therefore on the fringe of Judaism. But the proselyte here is looked upon as one who was circumcised but immature in the deep traditions and teachings of Judaism. The Jew considered himself **a teacher of** these immature proselytes. An eleventh advantage in verse 20, **having in the Law the embodiment of knowledge and of the truth.** The Greek word translated **embodiment** means that **in the Law** they had the rough sketch of all the essential features of knowledge. No area of life was left untouched by the Law. It is comprehensive in its breadth of knowledge and sketches the

basic foundations upon which we are to think about every area of life. The Gentiles did not have this rough sketch, it was the possession of the Jews but they were to be a light and transmit that knowledge to the Gentiles.

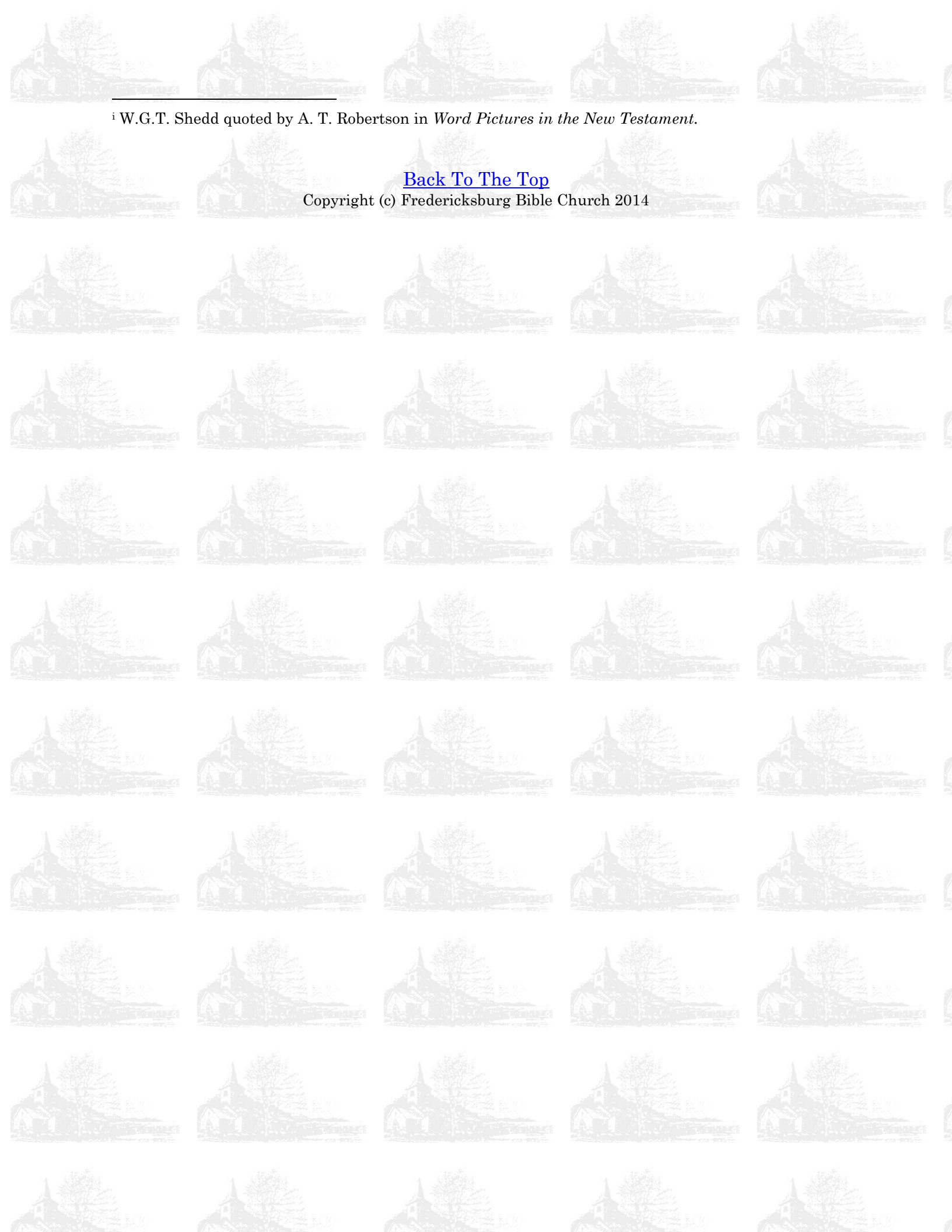
Look then at all that the Jew had. Look how many advantages he had over the Gentile. Look at all the privileges. And yet, did he live up to his privileges? Verse 21 begins a string of rhetorical questions that demonstrate he did not, **you, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself?** The implied answer is no. The teaching was fine but the following of it themselves was not. **You who preach that one shall not steal, do you steal?** Again, the implied answer is yes. The preaching was fine but the practicing of it was not. Paul is trying to unearth something here just as he was trying to unearth something with the pagan Gentiles and the moral Gentiles. None of us live up to the light we have been given. There is something deeply wrong with all of us. It is something that we cannot fix no matter how good our intentions. It is not something we can master but it masters us. In verse 22 Paul continues to press the point home, **You who say that one should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery?** The Greek word for **commit adultery** means to marry another while a prior spouse is still living. It is to be married to two people at the same time in God's eyes though a certificate of divorce may have been issued. It is a violation of contract. The Jews violated contract. Vincent says, "The Talmud charges the crime of adultery upon the three most illustrious Rabbins."¹ It was not uncommon for a Jew to charge his wife with some silly infraction such as burning his toast in order to get a bill of divorce so he could marry another. This was not the intent of the Law. The bill of divorce was permitted due to the hardness of heart; itself an evidence of condemnation. Also in verse 22, **You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?** The Jews claimed to **abhor idols**, yet they did **rob** Gentile **temples** as Acts 19:37 and Josephus IV, viii.10 attest. The Acts passage mentions that Paul and his companions were not "robbers of temples." The statement by the town clerk would not have been made if it were not a common occurrence. Josephus states the prohibition, "nor may anyone steal what belongs to strange temples nor take away the gifts that are dedicated to any god." He wouldn't have recorded the

¹ Marvin Richardson Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, vol. 3 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1887), 29.

prohibition if it wasn't a problem. The abhorrence of idols was according to Law but the robbing of idolatrous temples was a blatant contradiction.

Verse 23 summarizes, **You who boast in the Law, through your breaking the Law, do you dishonor God?** Of course the implied answer is yes, it is a dishonor to God to boast in His Law and then turn around and break the Law. The evidence that it dishonored God is not Paul's word but their own Scriptures. Paul quotes from the OT prophet Isaiah, chapter 52, verse 5. **For "THE NAME OF GOD IS BLASPHEMED AMONG THE GENTILES BECAUSE OF YOU," just as it is written.** Isaiah wrote of this blasphemy among Gentiles when the northern kingdom had gone into Exile to Assyria. In the ancient Assyrian worldview, if they defeated a foreign people it demonstrated that the Assyrian god was more powerful than the foreign people's god. When the Assyrians defeated the northern kingdom they blasphemed Israel's God. They interpreted their victory as indicating the superiority of their god over Israel's God. Of course, Israel was defeated and going into exile to Assyria because they had not broken the Law repeatedly. God allowed them to be defeated as divine discipline. Jews in Paul's day who broke the Law gave Gentiles the same opportunity to blaspheme their God that the Jews in Isaiah's day gave Gentiles. It is sad that they would repeat the same sins of their fathers but that is what they were doing. Any honest Jew would admit that he had broken the Law, dishonored God and given Gentiles the opportunity to blaspheme God. He therefore stood condemned along with pagan and moral Gentiles.

What have we seen? We've seen the definition of a Jew. A Jew is a physical descendant of Jacob through his father's side. These people are the covenant people of God and therefore God gave them the Abrahamic Covenant promising them ultimate blessing in the land. But He also gave them the Mosaic Covenant and set for the condition for enjoying blessing in the land as obedience. Because of this Covenant with all its stipulations the nation became arrogant and cut themselves off from interacting with Gentiles when they should have become humble and a light to the Gentiles, leading them to faith in the Messiah. But because of their hypocrisy it was evident that they too were condemned for their failure to live up to the revelation of God in the Law, the highest revelation enjoyed by any nation. There is none righteous, no not one.



¹ W.G.T. Shedd quoted by A. T. Robertson in *Word Pictures in the New Testament*.

[Back To The Top](#)

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