

The Religious Man

Romans 2:17-24

Introduction

Recently in the news has been the capture of some members of a South American theft ring - - - that has targeted the homes of various sports celebrities such as Patrick Mahomes and Joe Burrow – often breaking in while the players were away from home in a football game

Burrow's home was burglarized and thieves took about \$300,000 worth of luggage / jewelry / glasses / etc.

The thieves are from the country of Chile - - - and in the US illegally. - - - they face up to ten years in prison for the theft.

Of course – we are rightly disgusted by such things happening - - - and know that the young men knew what they were doing was wrong - - - they just didn't care

The Ten Commandments say – 'Thou shalt not steal'
The law of the land says – breaking and entering is a crime

We might contrast their actions to those of Sister Mary Margaret - - - a nun – a principal of a Roman Catholic School - - - a place where the Ten Commandments are likely to be seen displayed on the wall - - - and to be taught as part of Bible curriculum

Sister Mary Margaret - - - embezzled \$835,000 of school funds to her own personal account - - - to be used for gambling in Las Vegas. When arrested - - - she admitted – 'I have sinned. I have broken the law. I have no excuses.' - she was sentenced to a year in prison - - and ordered to pay back the funds.

One group sinned against the light of conscience – the other against the light of knowledge of God's Word

Both are equally blameworthy before God / without excuse

We are in the midst of a section where the Apostle Paul has been dealing with the absolute need of the gospel for every individual of the human race - - - all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God

Gentiles can't excuse themselves saying: 'I didn't know the Law'

Paul says that all have the law revealed to them thru the conscience

Jews can't excuse themselves saying: 'we have the Law' - - we know what it says - - -we are not like those pagans who go around breaking the law!

Paul does not accept that argument - - he says that they are just as guilty of violating God's laws as the pagan Gentile

Romans 2:21 - 'You who preach that one should not steal, do you steal?'

i.e. – Paul deals with a category of people – that we might call the religious man / the Jew

In our passage this morning - - Paul speaks to the situation of the Jews before God – they thought they were in good standing with God – but Paul says that they are headed for a rude awakening at the judgment

In fact – Jesus pointed in this direction with the Pharisees and Scribe / the religious leaders - - - who were quite smug in their religiosity / and acceptance before God

In Matthew 23 – Jesus issues a series of woes against them

Matt. 23:23-24 - 'Woe to you Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. You blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!'

They prided themselves on their adherence to ritual hand washings / their refusal to eat certain foods / their refusal to enter Gentile dwellings - - - their observance of Sabbath days / Passover festivals / circumcision - - - in the end their hearts were far from God – and they still fell under the condemnation of the Law

Jesus and Paul were saying the same thing:

Unless one is born-again / unless one is made a child of God by grace thru faith in the precious blood of Christ - - - they are unredeemed / they will face the just judgment of God for their sins

I. Speaking to the Jew - vv. 17-20

The Jews had the truth - - - but Paul asks the question: ‘What are you doing with the truth?’

The Jews were in possession of a great treasure - - - the word of God / the wisdom of God in OT revelation

They had the covenants / the sacrificial system which pointed forward to Jesus

They had the priesthood / the synagogue worship

But – as a whole - - - the nation itself drifted so far away from God - - - that God brought judgment on the nation – on multiple occasions - - - two most notable being the Babylonian captivity - - - which included the destruction of the temple built by Solomon - - - and then the destruction of Jerusalem carried out in 70 AD by the Roman General Titus- - - who destroyed the temple of Jesus’ day - - - and of which Jesus predicted its coming destruction

Matthew 21:33-46

In His parable - - - Jesus refers to a landowner - - - who owns a vineyard - - - and sent some servants to collect the proceeds – they are beaten / some killed - - - then the owner sends his own son - - - they kill him

The parable points to the sinful actions of Israel thru their history - - - God sent them prophets to call them back – such as Elijah and Elisha - - - but - - - no real repentance took place

Then the landowner sends His own Son - - - which refers to Jesus coming to Israel

They take Him and put Him to death on a cross

And Jesus announces that the kingdom of God will be taken from them and given to a nation producing the fruit of it – v. 43

Of course - - - this is highly debated and exegeted statement – ‘theological mountains are built upon it’ - - - but essentially Jesus is saying that the privileges given to the Jews would be taken from them and given to the church - - - which consists primarily of Gentiles

The church stands to inherit the promises given to Abraham / Isaac and Jacob

Galatians 3:7 - 'It is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham.'

Peter says to Christians:

I Peter 2:9, 10 - 'But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. For you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God.'

Now – does that mean that God is finished with Israel?

No - - - - we'll get to that in Romans 11

But the fundamental truths of the Christian faith as presented by Jesus and the Apostles – essentially said without equivocation to the Jew - - - don't expect your being a Jew to make you acceptable before God

Their privileges were squandered

The irony is that the same thing happens thru institutionalized Christianity - - - history repeats itself

Throughout church history - - - you see genuine Christians breaking away from apostate institutions - - - whether it be the Protestant Reformation / Martin Luther - - - we are not going to worship Mary / we hold to Scripture and the apostles - - not to tradition and the pope

On down to our day

The rise of the non-denomination churches really arose out of something called the fundamentalist / modernist controversy [1920s – 30s] - - - there was a schism which took place between liberal and conservative factions in the mainline churches - - - some people looked around and said - - - I don't think my church is Christian anymore

The churches controlled by liberals departed from:

- The authority of Scripture [we can't trust the Bible – the gospels we think were written in the 2nd century – not by eyewitnesses (which is nonsense)]
- The virgin birth of Christ [the supernatural was questioned]
- A literal bodily resurrection of Christ was seen as unnecessary [He just rose spiritually]
- The necessity of the blood atonement of Christ for our sins was seen as unnecessary

These are not small matters - - - and people rightly saw that to depart on these issues was to lose the gospel altogether

Just a few years back - - - a Presbyterian board wanted to change the words to the Getty's song - - - in Christ Alone

The offensive words to them were: 'that on the cross as Jesus died – the wrath of God was satisfied.'

To this 'Christian' board - - - the idea of Christ dying to satisfy the wrath of God was anathema to them! [ignoring the fact that such is historic Christianity]

A lot of religious stuff can be done that is actually offensive to God – blasphemy of the truth

Just as being a Jew did not save someone or make them acceptable before God

So today - - - simply being a Methodist or Presbyterian or Baptist or Lutheran - - - we would say – 'Don't count on that to save you.' - - - make sure you are in a church that holds to the authority of Scripture / preaches the gospel - - and that you yourself have exercised personal faith in Jesus Christ – calling upon Him as Lord and Savior

If that describes you - - -the kingdom of God have been given to you!

You are the chosen race / a royal priesthood / a holy nation

The Jews remind us of the utter danger of relying upon one's religiosity to make them acceptable before God

Jesus pronounced a series of woes on the Jewish religious leaders

Matthew 23:25-26 - 'Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence. You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may become clean also.'

Matthew 23:27-28 - 'Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. Even so you too outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.'

He called them hypocrites

Luke 12:1 - 'Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.'

Matthew 23:5, 6 - 'But they do all their deeds to be noticed by men; for they broaden their phylacteries, and lengthen the tassels of their garments. And they love the place of honor at banquets, and the chief seats in the synagogues.'

i.e. – it didn't really matter that the Jews had the Scriptures / the Law - - - they distorted it / twisted it / went further and further astray - - - just as liberal Protestantism has done with the gospel

Wait - these are the religious ones – the ones who pray on street corners / the ones who give bags of money to the temple treasury / the ones who fast and tithe / etc.

Certainly – the gospel is not needed for them

Paul says – indeed it is

The religious Jews were so blind to their sin

When they brought Jesus before Pilate - - - they refused to enter the praetorium [a Gentile dwelling] – because of their religious practices

John 18:28-29 - 'They led Jesus therefore from Caiaphas into the Praetorium, and it was early; and they themselves did not enter into the Praetorium in order that they might not be defiled, but might eat the Passover. Pilate, therefore went out to them, and said, "What accusation do you bring against this man?"

They remained outside - - -they were being religious - - - it would defile them to enter into a Gentile dwelling

They strained out a gnat and swallowed a camel

The real state of their religion was exposed in their treatment of Jesus

John 8:37-40 - I know that you are Abraham's offspring; yet you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you. "I speak the things which I have seen with My Father; therefore you also do the things which you heard from your father." 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. "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.'

John 8:41-43 - "You are doing the deeds of your father." They said to Him, "We were not born of fornication; we have one Father, even God." Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love Me; for I proceeded forth and have come from God, for I have not even come on My own initiative, but He sent Me. "Why do you not understand what I am saying? It is because you cannot hear My word.'

John 8:44-45 - "You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature; for he is a liar, and the father of lies. "But because I speak the truth, you do not believe Me.'

The real state of the Jews spirituality was revealed in their response to Jesus

They took Him and nailed him to a cross

The message of Scripture is that we are all sinners under the wrath of God and that nothing but the righteousness of God in Jesus Christ can save us

II. The Name of God Blasphemed - vv. 21-24

The Jews transgress the very Law they claim to treasure and teach!

The Jew boasted in the law - but did not keep it

The Prophet Amos indicted them for dishonesty and theft

Amos 8:5-8 - 'Hear this you who say, 'When will the new moon be over, so that we may sell grain, and the Sabbath that we may open the wheat market, to make the bushel smaller and the shekel bigger, and to cheat with dishonest scales . . . because of this will not the land quake and everyone who dwells in it mourn?'

They would follow certain externals of the law - - - but inwardly were cheats and dishonest with one another

Paul tells them that if they are going to be teachers of religion and morals – if they are going to boast in their piety - they need to practice what they preach [v. 22]

There was a sign hung on the outer wall of a religious facility that read: 'No trespassing – violators will be prosecuted to the full extent of the law' - - - signed – Sisters of Mercy

v. 24 – the name of God blasphemed

All of us have opportunity to bring shame or glory to the name of God in this world

When our light shines - - - the Father is glorified

When David sinned against the Lord with his adultery with Bathsheba / having Uriah bumped off in battle - - - Nathan the prophet said to him

II Samuel 12:14 - 'However, because by this deed you have given occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child also that is born to you shall surely die.'

When Israel sinned as a nation – or drifted into apostasy / worship of idols - - - what happened?

God allowed them to be defeated by foreign invaders

The Babylonian captivity – was due to their apostasy from God

And the Babylonians - - - particularly king Belshazzar - - - later had possession of the items from the temple in Jerusalem – and used them as drinking vessels - - - to get drunk with - - - essentially mocking the God of Israel

These Israelites! - - - their God couldn't even protect His own temple!

But God did defend His own glory - - - with the appearance of the handwriting on the wall - - - essentially telling Belshazzar his days were over – and he was thru that night

Same thing when the Philistines captured the ark of the covenant - - - and put it in the temple of Dagon

God was disciplining wayward Israel - - - they shouldn't have taken the ark into battle

But - - while the ark was housed in a Philistine temple - - - the idol to Dagon fell over! – hands and head cut off!

The defeat of Israel as an apostate nation was a necessary chastising of a wayward people - - - but it left the wrong impression upon the Gentiles – ‘Oh – their God is weak - - - He can't defend His people.’

So God Himself would act for His own name

The Jew - - - thru his own sin and conduct - - - caused the name of God to be blasphemed

We see the same thing today in the church - - - various scandals / sex scandals / financial scandals

A recent one broke in the Kansas City area -- - Mike Bickle who has claimed to be a prophet – started a ministry called the international house of prayer [IHOP] - - - probably eating pancakes while that idea came to him - - - thru an independent investigation - - - has been linked to 17 different incidents of sexual indiscretions – including adultery

I won't go into the details

Thru his profession and conduct – the name of God was blasphemed among the Gentiles

Jimmy Swaggart

[Wikipedia] Swaggart's first prostitution scandal occurred in 1986 when he accused fellow Assemblies of God minister Marvin Gorman of having several affairs. Gorman was defrocked from the Assemblies of God, and his ministry was all but ended. Gorman filed a successful lawsuit against Swaggart for defamation and conspiracy to ruin his reputation; he was awarded damages amounting to \$10 million in 1991. Following an appeal, the parties settled the matter for \$1.75 million.

As a retaliatory measure, Gorman hired his son Randy and son-in-law Garland Bilbo to watch the Travel Inn on Airline Highway in Metairie, a suburb of New Orleans. At the Travel Inn, the two men photographed Swaggart outside Room 7 with Debra Murphree, a local prostitute. Gorman arrived at the Travel Inn a short while later and confronted Swaggart.

According to *Swaggart* Gorman secured a promise from Jimmy that he would publicly apologize to Gorman and start the process of Gorman's reinstatement to the Assemblies of God. Gorman offered to remain silent if Swaggart would state publicly that he lied about Gorman's affairs.

So – a little back room dealing on who gets to be a pastor – [disgrace]

Gorman waited almost a year, then went public to the Executive Presbytery of the Assemblies of God. The presbytery leadership of the Assemblies of God suspended Swaggart from broadcasting his television program for three whole months. But – of course he did it again.

MLJ once made the point - - - have you ever noticed if a guy commits a crime - - - stealing / etc. - - - if he was once a SS teacher or a deacon 20 years ago - - - that fact will make it into the papers!

Satan doesn't miss his moment shine - - - and besmirch the glory of God

J. C. Ryle: 'Knowledge without practice is the character of the devil. None knows more truth, and none does more evil than he.'

Conclusion

J.C. Ryle: 'Let us show the world that though some men be hypocrites there are others who are honest and true.'

Let us have a sincere faith / a good conscience

We believe that we are justified not by the works of the Law - - - but thru faith in Christ Jesus and His shed blood / bodily resurrection- - - and that having been cleansed we are set free to walk in newness of life to the glory of our great God.

Sproul: 'God does not save us because of our spotless lives, but because we are clothed in Christ's righteous garments.'

When we sin – let's not excuse it - - - but repent and return to the fount of grace for cleansing and renewal