



The Epistle to the Romans

Lesson Number 6



BOTH JEWS AND GENTILES ARE GUILTY

(BOTH NEED A RIGHTEOUSNESS FROM GOD)

^{2:17}Indeed you are called a Jew, and rest on the law, and make your boast in God, ¹⁸and know His will, and approve the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law, ¹⁹and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, ²⁰an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, having the form of knowledge and truth in the law. ²¹You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal? ²²You who say, 'Do not commit adultery,' do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? ²³You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law? ²⁴For 'the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you,' as it is written."
(Romans 2:17-24^{NKJV})

INTRODUCTION

LESSON OUTLINE

- I. BOASTING IN FLESHLY DISTINCTIONS (2:17a)
- II. CONFIDENCE IN THE FLESH (2:17b-18)
- III. THINKING THAT IS TOO HIGH (2:19a)
- IV. FORM AND REALITY (2:19b-20)
- V. SCRIBES AND PHARISEES AGAIN (2:21-22)
- VI. BOASTING IN THE LAW (2:23)
- VII. THE NAME OF GOD BLASPHEMED BECAUSE OF THOSE WEARING HIS NAME (2:24)

The flesh possesses an inherent tendency to overestimate natural capacities. Although God has spoken at length concerning the fall of man and his need for justification, men continue to think they can measure up to God's requirements if only they have enough information. This is not the truth, and the

Spirit is effectively confirming that in this text. He has shown the universal and consistent decline of humanity when left to their own resources. The Gentiles and Jews stand together in this assessment. Neither God nor Satan forced humanity to decline. At the very seat of their being, where the will resides, they chose what God had condemned.

Nature itself shouted to them of God's "eternal power and Godhead." Their own conscience cried out in objection. Still, whenever men were delivered over to their own wills, they plummeted downward. There were not exceptions.

All of this is most unpleasant to the

flesh. It does not want to hear of its own deficiency and corruption. Nevertheless, God does not spare bringing these things to our attention. If we are going to seek "first" God's righteousness (Matt 6:33), we must first be persuaded that we have none of our own. With powerful words, the Spirit is confirming this is the case. In our own selves, we are unrighteous. In fact, the very best part of us (our righteousnesses) are filthy rags before God, to be disdained and discarded with haste (Isa 64:6).

Now the Lord will show further evidence of the deep corruption of mankind. He will focus upon the people who received more than any other society, the Jews. Although unparalleled advantages were given to them, they still did not rise from the moral pit into which sin had cast humanity. They had more

Even with all of the advantages given to them by God, the Jews still needed a righteousness from Him, by Given O. Blakely

information than anyone else. They were blessed above all others. They were given every possible benefit apart from regeneration, and yet sin dominated them, and did so ruthlessly.

Because of the strength of this argument, I am compelled to restate the advantage they received. It is staggering to consider. If external favor is sufficient to induce righteousness, the Jews would

certainly have been righteous.

They were given God's own words. *"What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision? Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God"* (Rom 3:1-2). Advantage and advance, however, are not the same. If receiving the Word of God is of itself sufficient to correct human

conduct, then a moral change should have been evident in Israel. But it was not! Even with such a marvelous advantage, flesh remained unchanged.

Now the Spirit will confirm it is not possible to obtain Divine acceptance by means of conferring blessings upon the flesh. It is not possible to have more fleshly distinction than Israel, and yet it was not adequate to make them righteous.

BOASTING IN FLESHLY DISTINCTION

2:17a **Indeed you are called a Jew . . .** "In all of the world, and throughout all history, there is only one nation that has achieved formal acceptance by God. That is the Jewish nation. This does not set well with the nationalist, but it perfectly accords with the Scriptures. Hear the Word of the Lord.

flesh, I more: Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless" (Phil 3:4-6).

peoples were classified as "Gentiles," or "the nations." They had no overt distinction before God. Only the Jew possessed that.

With great power, the Spirit will show that no name, national identity, or mere profession will gain the approval of God. If the Jews, favored above all fleshly people, needed a righteousness from God, there can be no question about every one else requiring it.

"For you are a holy people to the LORD your God, and the LORD has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples who are on the face of the earth" (Deut 14:2). *"For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth. The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: But because the LORD loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt"* (Deut 7:6-8). These are only representative of a number of similar Divine affirmations (Deut 26:18-19; 28:9-10; Ex 19:5-6).

All fleshly glorying is wrong. However, if it were allowed, it could only be based upon fleshly distinctions created and recognized by God Himself. These belonged exclusively to the Jews.

CALLED A JEW

The word "Jew" is used thirty-two times in Scripture. It is first used in the book of Esther, where it occurs no less than eight times. All of them refer to Mordecai, carried away by Nebuchadnezzar in the Babylonian captivity. Jesus is called "a Jew" (John 4:9), as well as Peter (Acts 10:28), Aquila (Acts 18:2), Apollos (Acts 18:24), and Paul (Acts 22:3). This section of Romans has affirmed the Gospel is God's power unto salvation "to the Jew first" (1:16). Eternal reward and punishment will also be "to the Jew first" (2:9-10).

Notice, there is not a solitary reference to anything unrelated to "Jewry." There is no reference to any Grecian learning from Tarsus (if he had even participated in such). No earthly credentials were cited, whether academic supremacy or oratorical skills. All fleshly glorying is wrong. However, if it were allowed, it could only be based upon fleshly distinctions created and recognized by God Himself. These belonged exclusively to the Jews.

The word "Jews" occurs forty-five times, also being mentioned first in the book of Esther. The mother of Timothy is called a "Jewess" (Acts 16:1), as well as Drusilla, the wife of Felix the Governor (Acts 24:24). I only mention this to point out the recognition and use of this term by the Holy Spirit.

PAUL'S PERSONAL AFFIRMATION

To confirm this distinction is absolutely unique, Paul cites the fleshly advantages he had. **They ALL pertained to his identity with Israel.** "Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the

THE POINT TO BE PROVED

The Spirit is stripping from humanity all self-confidence, showing that all men need a righteousness from God. He will particularly focus upon the Jews, for they alone had an outward basis which appeared to justify boasting. All other

The only reason for the distinction of this people is God's choice and blessing of them. Surely, if

Even with all of the advantages given to them by God, the Jews still needed a righteousness from Him, by Given O. Blakely

fleshly distinction can bring Divine acceptance, the Jews will qualify.

God's exclusive dealings were with them. *"Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen"* (Rom 9:4-5).

Adoption. God made them His own people—*"adoption."* Above all other peoples, they belonged to Him Ex 19:5; Deut 7:6; 10:15; 26:19). He focused His attention upon them, even populating the world with them in mind (Deut 32:8). They belonged exclusively to Him.

Glory. The Lord revealed Himself to them, showing them facets of His Person that were not vouchsafed to any other people—*"glory."* They saw more of the Lord than any other people. His glory led them, fed them, and protected them. When He spoke, He spoke to them. When He revealed Himself, He did so to them.

Covenants. Almighty God made agreements only with them. He made certain promises to them, showing His commitment to them—*"covenants."* He told them if they would obey Him, they would receive unprecedented blessings. Perhaps you have not thought recently of the magnitude of some of those promises.

- ▶ No male or female would be barren among them or their cattle—Deut 7:14.
- ▶ God would bless their water and their bread—Ex 23:25a.
- ▶ He would take sickness away from them—Ex 23:25b.
- ▶ He would make all of their enemies turn from them—Ex 23:27.
- ▶ He would drive all of the enemies from their land in one year, lest the beasts of the field multiply against them—Ex 23:29.
- ▶ He would bless them in the city and in the field—Deut 28:3.
- ▶ God would bless the offspring of the people, land, cattle, and sheep—Deut 28:4.

- ▶ Their baskets and kneading bowls would be blessed with an abundance of food—Deut 28:5.
- ▶ They would be blessed when they came in, and blessed when they went out—Deut 28:6.
- ▶ God would cause their enemies to be smitten before them, and run seven different ways—Deut 28:7.
- ▶ He would command a blessing upon their storehouses—Deut 28:8a.
- ▶ Everything they put their hand to would prosper—Deut 28:8b.
- ▶ They would be plenteous in goods, offspring, cattle, and crops—Deut 28:11.
- ▶ The heavens would give rain to them at the proper time—Deut 28:12a.
- ▶ They would lend to many nations, and never borrow—Deut 28:12b.
- ▶ God would make them the head, and not the tail—Deut 28:13.

were given directions on how to approach God. No other nation had a tabernacle, or a God-honored priesthood. No other sacrifices were acceptable, and God's glory filled no other dwelling devoted to Divine service. It all belonged to them. *"The service"* refers to the activities related to the tabernacle, and later the Temple (Ex 27:19; 30:16; 39:40; Heb 9:6,9). It belonged exclusively to the Jews.

The promises. The promises of a Savior and a new and effective covenant were given to the Jews (Lk 1:54,55,69-74; Acts 2:39; 3:25-26; 13:32-33). No other people received promises of either a Savior or a new covenant. It is said of the Gentiles, they were *"strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world"* (Eph 2:12).

The fathers. This term refers to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—the progenitors of the Jewish people. It also included the faithful leaders of that unique nation (Acts 3:22; 13:32; Rom 11:28; 15:8; Heb 1:1). There were no Gentile priests, prophets, or kings among the people of Israel. When it came to God-blessed progenitors, they all belonged to Israel.

There were no Gentile priests, prophets, or kings among the people of Israel. When it came to God-blessed progenitors, they all belonged to Israel.

These are only a sampling of the covenants God made with Israel. If Divine commitments alone can make men better, these surely would have been effective.

The Law. The giving of the Law was an historical epoch. In this revelation, God communicated a moral code of remarkable precision. Sin was defined, and the Sovereignty of God revealed. **If Divine tutelage in the matter of right and wrong is sufficient to spark a change in humanity, this certainly would do it.** Even the giving of the Law was most marvelous. They received it *"by the direction of angels"*^{NKJV} (Acts 7:53). Galatians 3:19 reminds us *"it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator."* The Ten Commandments, the *"words of the covenant"* (Ex 34:28) were written by the very finger of God (Ex 31:18). No one else was so favored.

The Service. The worship of God belonged exclusively to them. They alone

Jesus came from their lineage. Even the Lord Jesus, according to the flesh, came from Jewish ancestry (Rom 1:3). The promised *"Son,"* whose name would be called Immanuel, was promised to them (Isa 7:14; 9:6-7). The lineage of the Lord Jesus, according to the flesh, is strictly through Jewish ancestry. Although Luke does trace Christ's lineage back to Adam, it is through the ancestors of the Jewish race.

GROUND FOR BOASTING?

People boast of being an American, but what is that to compare with being a Jew! Above being a Roman citizen (Acts 22:25-29), Paul was a Jew. Our text will affirm, however, that this was no ground for boasting before God. The mouths of all who are not righteous before God are, by that very condition, stopped by God. It makes no difference what they have received, or how unique they have been according to the flesh. The flesh, even when blessed by God, cannot produce

acceptable goodness.

We will see this is a most relevant

facet of the truth. Those in Christ *“have no confidence in the flesh”* (Phil 3:3). God will allow *“no flesh to glory in His sight”*

(1 Cor 1:29). You may be sure, if Jewish flesh cannot glory, no flesh can. They own the only fleshly distinction before God.

CONFIDENCE IN THE FLESH

“2:17b . . . and rest on the law, and make your boast in God,¹⁸ and know His will, and approve the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law . . . ” Here is an extensive delineation of *“confidence in the flesh”*—or glorying in external, or apparent advantage. This is particularly reprehensible since the new creation has *“no confidence in the flesh”* (Phil 3:3), for in the flesh *“dwells no good thing”* (Rom 7:18). It *“profits nothing”* (John 6:63), even when given every possible advantage.

REST ON THE LAW

This does not speak of a love for God’s law, as expressed in Psalm 119:97. *“O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day.”* Those who were upbraided were merely boasting in their possession of the Law, not the keeping of it. It was as though they had received a valuable and rare relic, but found no real utility for it. Their reliance upon the law was, as someone has said, *“blind and mechanical.”*^{Robertson} The possession of the Law, as well as their academic understanding of it, was thought to have made them superior. Jesus put it this way to the Pharisees. *“Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me”* (John 5:39).

By resting, or relying, upon the Law, they trusted in what God had given rather than in God Himself. The fact that He gave them the Law was taken as a sign of Divine approval. Because of the blindness of their heart, they were unaware that the Law was given *“that every mouth might be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God”* (Rom 3:19).

MAKE YOUR BOAST IN GOD

The Living God was viewed more as

a national treasure than as the Sovereign God of heaven. He belonged, as it were, to them. Thus they failed to see the situation correctly. They belonged to the Lord, He did **not** belong to them, as though He was their private possession.

In this case, although the Jew was living in condemnation, he glorified in

Of course, Jewry is the only religious institution God has ever sanctioned—and that was only until the entrance of the Savior into the world. If such boasting is not allowed for the Jew, you may be sure it is soundly condemned in institutions that are purely of human origin.

God being, as he thought, the God of the Jews. Later the Spirit will point out the absurdity of such an assumption. *“Is He the God of the Jews only? is He not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also”* (3:29).

To *“boast in God”* is to view Him as exclusively identified with an institution—in this case, the Jews. Of course, Jewry is the only religious institution God has ever sanctioned—and that was only until the entrance of the Savior into the world. If such boasting is not allowed for the Jew, you may be sure it is soundly condemned in institutions that are purely of human origin.

KNOW HIS WILL

Knowing the will of God is ordinarily

commendable, and is the objective for every child of God (Rom 12:10). But that is not the case here. This is a prideful, or boastful, knowledge. It is not the spiritual knowledge of the will of God (Col.1:9-10). Here the knowledge of the Law is vainly placed above the doing of it. **The law did not pronounce the blessing upon those who “KNEW” the Law, but those who DID it** (Gal 3:12). The propensity of the Jews to glory more in knowing that in doing is epitomized in the Pharisees. Once, when they sent officers to arrest Jesus, the men returned without Him. The Scripture records the dialog between the officers and the Pharisees. Here is how they reasoned. *“Then the officers came to the chief priests and Pharisees, who said to them, ‘Why have you not brought Him?’ The officers answered, ‘No man ever spoke like this Man!’ Then the Pharisees answered them, ‘Are you also deceived? Have any of the rulers or the Pharisees believed in Him. But this crowd that **does not know the law is accursed.**”*

The Law did not say the person who “does not know the law is cursed.” Rather, it declared *“Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them”* (Gal 3:12; Deut 27:26). Being an expert in what God requires does commend the individual to God. That is not sufficient ground for boasting.

To view it another way, knowing all of the answers cannot make a person righteous.

APPROVE THINGS THAT ARE EXCELLENT

Again, approving things that are excellent is the objective for every true believer. As it is written, *“And this I pray,*

Even with all of the advantages given to them by God, the Jews still needed a righteousness from Him, by Given O. Blakely

that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; That ye may approve things that are excellent" (Phil 1:9-10). However, that is not the condition described in this text. This is a self-confidence produced by the flesh. It approaches the "approval" in question from a purely academic viewpoint.

This type of approval was seen in the Pharisees, who sat in judgment upon the conduct of even Jesus and His disciples. Thinking themselves experts in the Law, they bound their own perception of the Law upon others. That perception, however, was a human tradition, and not the real meaning of the Law. Matthew provides us a vivid example of this kind of reasoning. "Then came to Jesus scribes and Pharisees, which were of Jerusalem, saying, why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread. But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?" (Matt 15:1-3).

The scribes and Pharisees were not the last people to bind their own tradition upon others, imagining themselves capable of "approving things that are excellent."

INSTRUCTED OUT OF THE LAW

According to Divine mandate, the Jews were taught out of the Law from early childhood. As it is written, "You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up" (Deut 6:7).

This was good knowledge, and not to be despised. However, it did not make the individual righteous, regardless of the extent of the knowledge gained. At the very best, the Law, together with the Prophets, were able to make the submitted one "wise unto salvation" (2 Tim 3:15), but it could not bring the experience of salvation. That comes through Christ alone. As it is written, "For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face

of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor 4:6). That is quite different from glorying that one has been "instructed out of the Law." Such is vain boasting that places no value on Christ.

There is a significant point made in this text. Possessing the word, even having a sense of its meaning, is not sufficient to make a person righteous. Even if the individual is able to explain the circumstances under which Scripture was written, giving the historical context and profound language significations, it has no affect whatsoever on making the person righteous before God. A church, for example, that possesses the truth is not necessarily one that is commended by it. Some may boast of being "the New Testament church," imagining that their pattern and manners commend them

hope of Divine acceptance. That only comes through faith in Christ.

The Church at Ephesus

Recalling the church at Ephesus will suffice to confirm what we have said. Much like the Jews of old, they were experts in evaluating the conduct of others. They were even commended for their condemnation of gross doctrinal corruption. However, the single flaw they had was sufficient to cause their rejection if they did not repent. They had neglected Jesus Christ, who is made our righteousness. Here is the record. "To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands: I know your works, your labor, your

Possessing the word, even having a sense of its meaning, is not sufficient to make a person righteous. Even if the individual is able to explain the circumstances under which Scripture was written, giving the historical context and profound language significations, it has no affect whatsoever on making the person righteous before God.

before God. That is much like boasting in being a Jew, having the Scriptures, and being able to approve things that are excellent.

The purpose of redemption in Christ Jesus is not to produce a flawless organization. It is not to build a spiritual tower of Babel, the result of a unified human initiative. God is not seeking to restore the church at Jerusalem, or the commendable one at Philippi. His objective is not to fill every church with certain spiritual gifts. It is not even to assist men in building and maintaining a godly nation. All of those things may have a place, but it is certainly subordinate to the purpose of God.

The Divine initiative has always involved paving the way for the righteousness of God to be given to men. Without that righteousness, there is no

patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary. Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place; unless you repent" (Rev 2:1-5).

It should be evident that this type of conduct did not end with Ephesus. Many a person and church are living in practical alienation from God. Their love has cooled and their vision has dimmed. They may boast in their intellectual grasp of Scripture, and may point us to the precision of their religious activities. All of that does not make them righteous.

THINKING THAT IS TOO HIGH

^{19a} . . . and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, ²⁰an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes . . . ” Here the Jews are chided for thinking more highly of themselves than they ought to think. They did, indeed, gain Divine advantage in receiving the Law (Rom 3:1). They were a chosen people, and were favored above all other nations on the face of the earth. But none of that was owing to their own doing. Divine initiative brought it all.

The confidence of reference comes from being wise in ones own eyes (Prov 26:12). God’s view of such confidence is declared by the prophet Isaiah. “Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!” (Isa 5:21). This is not a confidence that comes from a sense of Divine acceptance or the experience of the grace of God. It is the result of thinking exposure to the truth, and an academic understanding of it, qualifies the individual to instruct others in the ways of the Lord. Let it be clear, this is emphatically not the case.

THE EXAMPLE OF NICODEMUS

Nicodemus is a case in point. While there is no evidence that he was a judgmental man, or that he was unduly harsh with others, the Lord pointed out his fundamental deficiency in spiritual matters. With a tone of authority Nicodemus said, “*Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.*” Quickly, Jesus announced that a new birth was necessary before one could “see” or “enter” into the Kingdom of God. After a brief elaboration, Nicodemus, with all of his acquaintance with the Law, still did not understand. He replied, “*How can these things be?*” It was then that our Lord exposed the depravity of a merely human understanding of the Law. “*Art*

thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness. If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things?” (John 3:1-12). As I understand it,

As valuable as erudition is, it is not the heart of kingdom-understanding. A disciplined and logical mind, and a thorough acquaintance with the text of Scripture are not to be despised. However, neither are they to be elevated as though they were sufficient in themselves. They have no impact at all upon human character.

Nicodemus was not being obstinate, but had not yet seen the deficiency of nature in the matter of comprehending the things of God.

SPIRITUAL UNDERSTANDING

As valuable as erudition is, it is not the heart of kingdom-understanding. A disciplined and logical mind, and a thorough acquaintance with the text of Scripture are not to be despised. However, neither are they to be elevated as though they were sufficient in themselves. They have no impact at all upon human character. They cannot change the affection or renew the heart. Neither, indeed, can they bring righteousness to the person possessing them. That is the point of our text.

There is a higher form of understanding. It does not promote pride,

or “puff up” those who have it, as earthly knowledge does (1 Cor 8:1). This is “spiritual understanding,” and it comes from God. It is the RESULT of true righteousness, and not the cause of it. Paul prayed for believers to have this kind of understanding. “*For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God*” (Col 1:9-10).

THE DESCRIBED PLIGHT

Those addressed in our text considered others “blind,” those who were “in darkness,” “foolish,” and “babes.” That assessment, however, was not determined by the attainment of the people, but by comparing them with themselves. They were judged to be such simply because they were not Jews. They had not received the Law, and did not have an understanding of it. The haughty Jews, on the other hand, considered themselves “guides,” “light,” “instructors,” and “teachers.” This was not because they were any better in the eyes of the Lord. It was not because their hearts were more pure, or because they were righteous in the eyes of the Lord. It was solely upon the basis of external, or fleshly, advantage.

As real as that advantage was, however, it had not changed their character, cleansed their hearts, or made them pure in the eyes of the Lord. Their flesh was more cultured, it is true. However, it was still flesh, for “*that which is born of flesh is flesh,*” and can be nothing else. They too needed a righteousness from God. That necessity disqualified them from sitting in judgment upon others.

In this text, the real necessity is not moral purity, but receiving a

Even with all of the advantages given to them by God, the Jews still needed a righteousness from Him, by Given O. Blakely

righteousness from God. That does not allow for immorality, but provides strength to kill it at its root—in the heart. To put it another way, righteousness from God brings with it a hatred for sin. That is because we become “*partakers of the Divine nature*,” which is repulsed by all forms of sin, whether they are expressed externally or not.

INSTITUTIONAL DEFICIENCY

In our time and place, institutionalism has been equated with

life in Christ Jesus. The institution trains and authorizes those who will speak for the Lord. The credentials conferred upon such people have nothing whatsoever to do with being born again, possessing the righteousness of God, or being taught by God. They are precisely the same kind of credentials of which the Jews boasted—except they are not as credible as theirs. The Jews DID receive the law from God, and were singularly blessed by Him above all people. No nation has ever enjoyed such a favored status—or any status at all,

for that matter.

In my judgment, those who exalt the institution owe us an explanation. What is it that excludes them from the rebuke of this very text? Have they been excluded in the matter of requiring a righteousness from God? If not, how is it that they speak so little of it, if, indeed, they ever do? This passage is certainly relevant to our day. It has all the freshness and power it did to the Romans. It is the peculiar prerogative of God’s word to always be relevant.

FORM AND REALITY

“^{19b} . . . having the form of knowledge and truth in the law.²⁰ An instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which hast the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law.” Here the Spirit develops a critical distinction between empty profession and spiritual possession.

“FORM”

Something that has “*form*” is made accessible to the human mind. “*Form*” is the orderly presentation of reality. It is not the reality itself, but so clothes the reality that it becomes useful. Thus, until the earth took form, no real purpose was served by it, and the glory of God could not be seen in it. “*And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep*” (Gen 1:2; Jer 4:23). Until, however, the earth took form, it was not a suitable arena for the working of salvation in its midst.

Baptism

In the sixth chapter of this book, baptism is referred to as “*that form of doctrine to which you were delivered*” (6:17). It is a depiction of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. Yet, it is not the reality of those things. Unless there is a real participation in them, neither obedience nor baptism has really occurred.

The Humility of Christ

When Jesus entered into the world,

He “*took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men*” (Phil 2:7). But the matter extended to more than mere form. He fulfilled the form to the most exacting degree. “*He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross*” (Phil 2:8), and “*was tempted in all points like as we are*” (Heb 4:15).

Therefore, in our text, the ultimate possession is not merely the “*form of knowledge and of the truth*.” That is an advantage, but not the ultimate advantage. The Jews, however, rested in their possession of the “*oracles of God*,” even though in their hearts they were at

parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom” (Psa 51:6). The truth must be part of the individual before it brings eternal advantage. It cannot simply be housed in the memory, or embraced as a formal creed.

One aspect of the New Covenant that is especially precious pertains to this very matter. In His promise of the New Covenant, God said, “*I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts*” (Jer 31:33). Hebrews 8:10 reads, “*I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts*.” This refers to a basic change in the nature of man. The Law of God is thus harmonious with the renewed human spirit. The individual finds it to be his preference, and continual subject of meditation (Psa 1:2).

The truth must be part of the individual before it brings eternal advantage. It cannot simply be housed in the memory, or embraced as a formal creed

THE LAW, NOT AN END OF ITSELF

The Law was not an end of itself. That is, it was not enough to simply have received it. To boast, therefore, in the knowledge of it was unwarranted. It was possible to be an expert in the sayings of the Law, and yet be totally lacking in righteousness before God. It was not intended to produce confidence in men. Rather, it was a schoolmaster, or tutor, “*to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith*” (Gal 3:24). Duly heeded, the Law will convince men of their need for a Savior, constraining them to call upon the name of the Lord.

variance with them. **The shell of the truth is not enough.** A mere academic, or theoretical knowledge is not sufficient to save the soul.

Truth within

God desires truth to be found in the inner recesses of man. As it is written, “*Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward*

You see, then, how serious a condition is being described by the Spirit. Rather than bringing the Jews to an acute awareness of their need for a Savior, they imagined that they were exalted above all others by the mere possession of the Law. Thus they sat in judgment upon others, while failing to seek after a righteousness from God.

knowledge of these men.

Perhaps you have heard someone boast of knowing what the Scripture means through contextual, language, or historical considerations. Some have even said it is not possible to understand the Scriptures unless one has a working knowledge of the Greek and Hebrew. It all

have no spiritual power. It would be a time of falling away and strong delusion. The prophecy is relevant to this text. In Romans, the Jews are being upbraided for their feelings of superiority, even though they stood in need of a righteousness from God just like the Gentiles. The prophecy of reference confirms that precisely the same attitude became prevalent in the Gentile church.

Ultimately, true knowledge comes from acquaintance with God, through Christ, and by the Spirit. Although some may flinch at such a declaration, they cannot overthrow it. There is not a single aspect of salvation that can be experienced independently of fellowship with the Father and the Son.

*“But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: for men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, **having a form of godliness but denying its power.** And from such people turn away!”^{NKJV} (2 Tim 3:1-5).*

Remember, the point of this passage is to show that all men need the righteousness revealed in the Gospel of Christ. Even those with expert knowledge of the Law need this righteousness. Their knowledge does not make them righteous.

may sound quite innocent, but it is not. It comes under the very subject of our text.

Ultimately, true knowledge comes from acquaintance with God, through Christ, and by the Spirit. Although some may flinch at such a declaration, they cannot overthrow it. There is not a single aspect of salvation that can be experienced independently of fellowship with the Father and the Son. Just as there is no valid work without faith, there is no spiritually valid knowledge that is developed solely by man. Our text is a sound condemnation of those who imagine such a knowledge does exist.

The Kingdom of God is so revealed that the form, or external identity, can be maintained, while lacking its inner power. The “power” is found in the righteousness of God which comes by faith. Where that righteousness is not found, there can be no spiritual power. Where it is found, confidence in the flesh is destroyed, for God has determined *“That no flesh should glory in his presence”* (1 Cor 1:29).

KNOWLEDGE PUFFS UP

Confirming that fleshly knowledge (as compared with “*spiritual understanding*”), puffs up the flesh, behold how these people viewed those they instructed. They imagined themselves to be instructors “*of the foolish,*” and “*teachers of babes.*” And what was the basis of this observation? Was it spiritual immaturity, or a lack of acquaintance with God through Christ? Indeed not. Those so judged had simply not measured up to the donnish

FORM WITHOUT POWER

The Spirit declared a time would come when religion would flourish, yet

Even those with every possible external advantage need a righteousness from God. That should be apparent from the Gospel itself.

SCRIBES AND PHARISEES AGAIN

“²¹You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal? ²²You who say, ‘Do not commit adultery,’ do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?”

subdue the flesh, for that can only be done through the Spirit. As it is written, “*if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live*” (Rom 8:13). In the energy of the flesh, men may change the appearance of the sin, but they cannot change its nature.

with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations; ‘Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle,’ which all concern things which perish with the using; according to the commandments and doctrines of men? These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh” (Col 2:20-23). Suffice it to say, an appearance of wisdom is not sufficient.

THE NECESSITY OF A RIGHTEOUSNESS FROM GOD

Where the righteousness of God is not possessed, religious men are shut up to inconsistency. They will not be able to

The Impotence of Mere Discipline

In addressing this very matter, the Scriptures speak of the worthlessness of religious discipline, or procedures that rely on regimen. “*Therefore, if you died*

Even with all of the advantages given to them by God, the Jews still needed a righteousness from Him, by Given O. Blakely

The “*basic principles of the world*” are carnal means of controlling the appetites of the flesh. At the highest end, they are represented in the Law and its attending ordinances. At the lowest end they are regimens and procedures developed by men to restrain an outbreak of wrong doing. They are also employed to culture the person from a mere external point of view.

Nearly all contemporary teaching on morality falls into this category—“*Basic principles,*” or rudiments, “*of the world.*” They are not spiritual in nature, nor do they produce spiritual results. They do have an appearance of wisdom. That is why those who hawk them to the spiritually ignorant are so successful in convincing men of their worth. But it is a “*self-imposed religion,*” void of any Divine influence. God is not in it, nor is salvation central to it. **It is an attempt to regulate the flesh without God or Christ.** The rules imposed upon men by this approach “*lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.*”^{NIV} It cannot take away the desire to sin, which is the problem with fallen man.

difficulty—uncleanness within. Sin has defiled man at the very center of his nature. That is precisely why he needs a righteousness from God.

Referring to this condition, Jesus declared this about man’s righteousness. “*For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven*”^{NKJV} (Matt 5:20). How is it that our righteousness could “*exceed*” that of the Pharisees? It certainly could not come by mere human discipline, for they were masters at that. Jesus said they made their external lives “*clean*”—something

of God, that you may keep your tradition” (Mark 7:6-9).

Ponder the gravity of the matter we are considering. Here was an approach to God that left people unchanged within—full of hypocrisy and iniquity. It left their hearts far from God, moved them to prefer the traditions of men, and caused them reject the commandment of God. Is it possible for a condition to be more serious?

I have taken the time to view the scribes and Pharisees because it is directly related to the attitude now condemned. This frame of mind is altogether too common in our day, and needs to be exposed for what it is. It may produce “*nice*” people, and aid in developing outward culture. However, it is not accepted by God. His requirement is that man possess the righteousness given by Him, and revealed in the Gospel.

Nearly all contemporary teaching on morality falls into this category—“*Basic principles,*” or rudiments, “*of the world.*” They are not spiritual in nature, nor do they produce spiritual results. They do have an appearance of wisdom.

DO YOU NOT TEACH YOURSELF?

“*You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself?*”^{NKJV} Formalistic and lifeless religion has the trait of making people judgmental of those who do the very things found in

themselves. Speaking to teachers, the Spirit says, “*The husbandman that laboreth must be first partaker of the fruits*” (2 Tim 2:6). In this case, the teacher must first ingest the word he declares. That is another way of saying “*teach yourself.*”

In our day we have seen several examples of *Christian* teachers who have revealed their own abysmal ignorance of living unto God. Some of them fell into the very transgressions they vehemently denounced. Why do such things occur? **Because apart from the righteousness of God, no real change takes place within the individual.** And even if the righteousness was once obtained by faith, if it is not maintained by faith, the individual will revert back to inward uncleanness.

The Scriptures refer to this condition as “*always learning and never able to*

SCRIBES AND PHARISEES

This approach to controlling eruptions of immorality was employed by the scribes and Pharisees. By its very nature, this course of action dealt only with the outward man. Thus Jesus severely indicted them. “*Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men’s bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity*” (Matt 23:25-28).

You see how their self-imposed rules did not correct the seat of man’s

relatively few professed believers have managed to do. However, that was not enough, for it did not address the matter of inward corruption.

The seriousness of this offense is worthy of special notation. In dealing only with outward conduct and appearance, the Pharisees had embraced a religion that honored God with the mouth, yet maintained a distance from Him in the heart. In so doing their worship became vain, as they laid aside the commandment of God. Jesus said it this way. “*Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: ‘This people honors Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’ For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men; the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do. He said to them, ‘All too well you reject the commandment*

come to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Tim 3:7). It is a most serious circumstance. The Spirit will now develop this more fully, showing that sin remains dominant wherever the righteousness of God is not found. He will show that the spirit of the Law went far beyond mere appearance. **Sin CANNOT be subdued by Law, nor can righteousness be attained by disciplines invented by men.**

DO YOU STEAL?

“You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal?” It appears there is an allusion to the fiftieth Psalm. “But to the wicked God says: ‘What right have you to declare My statutes, Or take My covenant in your mouth, seeing you hate instruction and cast My words behind you? When you saw a thief, you consented with him’”^{NKJV} (50:16-18). Thus, the person who condones the thief partakes in his sin. But there is more to this than that.

The command of God forbids ALL stealing, or theft. Some stealing takes place by stealth, where unlawful gain is realized by deception. Thus, “extortion” is soundly condemned, with the promise those who practice it will be excluded from the kingdom of God (1 Cor 6:10). The Pharisees practiced this form of stealing. Of them, Jesus said, “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows’ houses” (Matt 23:14). It might astound you to know how much of this sort of thing goes on in the Christian community.

Peter warned of teachers who were actually thieves, exploiting people for personal advantage. “By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words” (2 Pet 2:3). Jude said of them, “For they have gone in the way of Cain, have run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit” (Jude 11).

Souls of Men

The Scriptures also speak of thieves who barter with the souls of men. They actually traffic in people, enslaving them to their foolish philosophies. Speaking of Babylon the great, the false church

perpetrated by Satan, the Spirit says the following. “And the merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her, for no one buys their merchandise anymore: merchandise of gold and silver, precious stones and pearls, fine linen and purple, silk and scarlet, every kind of citron wood, every kind of object of ivory, every kind of object of most precious wood, bronze, iron, and marble; and cinnamon and incense, fragrant oil and frankincense, wine and oil, fine flour and wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, **AND BODIES AND SOULS OF MEN**” (Rev 18:11-13).

Here two forms of slavery are

The souls of men belong to God, and God alone. Thus it is written, “All souls are mind” (Ezek 18:4). God alone is the “Father of spirits” (Heb 12:9). To barter in the institutional arena with the souls of men is unspeakably wicked.

described: bodily and spiritual. We are familiar with the former, when men were made slaves to other men. Many are not as familiar with the latter, when the souls of men are shackled to the traditions and manners of men.

The souls of men belong to God, and God alone. Thus it is written, “All souls are mind” (Ezek 18:4). God alone is the “Father of spirits” (Heb 12:9). To barter in the institutional arena with the souls of men is unspeakably wicked. You should know that religious men have made great names for themselves and fattened their coffers at the expense of “the souls of men.” They were thieves!

Again, the Pharisees surface as an example of this kind of activity. “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves” (Matt 23:15). The

word of God refers to such individuals as “menstealers,” or “kidnappers” (1 Tim 1:10). There is far more of this kind of activity in the religious world than one might think.

Robbing God

There is another form of stealing that is particularly reprehensible. It is stealing from God—robbing Him of what belongs to Him. Through Malachi, God upbraided the children of Israel for this very sin. “Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation” (Mal 3:8). Some will object that tithing has nothing whatsoever to do with us. But that is a human assessment, not a Divine one. Anyone imagining that robbing God no longer occurs is not thinking properly.

The point of our text is the person’s religion actually permitted, and even encouraged, these things. That is how corrupt man is by nature. **If he does not have a righteousness from God, he will actually seek to justify his wickedness in his religion.** This is done while preaching the Law, as though it did not apply to him.

DO YOU COMMIT ADULTERY?

“You who say, ‘Do not commit adultery,’ do you commit adultery?”^{NKJV} It is enough to mention that a high degree of immorality exists among those who declare the Word of God. Explanations have been offered for this, but none of them are acceptable. **The reason for lapses into immorality among preachers and teachers is that they have NOT obtained a righteousness from God.** Thus, seeking to establish their own righteousness, they fell prey to the sin that was within their own members.

Spiritual Adultery

There is another form of adultery that is altogether too common in the churches. It is friendship with the world—obtaining worldly manners, and

joining in affinity with it. James soundly condemns this in his Epistle. *“Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures. Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God”* (James 4:1-4).

Here is a most significant word, appropriate for our day. Professed believers were experiencing wars and fights among themselves. They had such strong desires for pleasure, that they caused trouble among the saints to satisfy them. Rather than denying worldly lusts, they cultured them, even at the expense of their own brethren. They fought among themselves. Their prayers were futile, for they only sought to satisfy their own quest for pleasure.

If ever there was a vivid picture of the Christian world, this is it. Divisions, wars, and tumults are altogether too common, as people seek their own interests above those of God. The average congregation has also battled through such things, where board meetings and congregational meetings erupted into red-faced arguments.

The Spirit traces these things back to their source. **It is the result of friendship with the world!** The people have prostituted their affections, giving them to the world instead of to the Lord. James frankly calls such *“adulterers and adulteresses.”* They have been unfaithful to God, and have thus become His enemy. That is not a suggestion, but is reality!

Lest we miss the point of our text, the Spirit is confirming the need for a righteousness from God. Without this righteousness, even those who preach and teach are powerless to subdue the expressions of the flesh. They may master

outward refinement and culture, but their sinful natures will remain alive and well.

DO YOU ROB TEMPLES?

“You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?” The KJV reads, *“thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege?”* The word *“sacrilege”* is a significant one. It comes from a word that means to “remove sacred property, or rob temples.” **The idea is that one who professes to hate false religion, still seeks to profit from it.**

Seen In Israel

When Israel overthrow heathen nations, they were always commanded to destroy their idols. None of them were to be kept for any reason. The words of the Law were particularly strong on this. *“You shall burn the carved images of their gods with fire; you shall not covet the silver or gold that is on them, nor take it*

To attempt to place the jewel of redemption in a setting of the world’s wisdom is to rob the temple of idols. It is to defile the temple of God. It is something that nullifies the power of the Gospel and makes the cross of Christ of “none effect.”

for yourselves, lest you be snared by it; for it is an abomination to the LORD your God. Nor shall you bring an abomination into your house, lest you be doomed to destruction like it. You shall utterly detest it and utterly abhor it, for it is an accursed thing”^{NKJV} (Deut 7:25-26). **What God had cursed could not be desired or kept by the people of God.**

You may remember that Achan brought a curse upon all of Israel for coveting and taking *“the accursed thing.”* The result of his deed is thus described, *“and the anger of the LORD was kindled against the children of Israel”* (Josh 7:1). This was a form of sacrilege—defiling the people and things of God by bringing what God has cursed into their presence.

The Perception of Paul

Himself possessing the righteousness of God, Paul was particularly sensitive about this matter. For example, he knew the Lord had rejected the wisdom of this world, declaring it to be foolishness. Thus it is written, *“For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness. And again, The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain”* (1 Cor 3:19-20).

But it is not enough to merely say this. His understanding of this moved Paul to refuse to seek to gain from what God had condemned. That is why he wrote, *“For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect”* (1 Cor 1:17). And again, *“And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified”* (1 Cor 2:1-2). And again, *“And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God”* (1 Cor 2:4-5).

Not A Small Matter

Do not think this is a small matter. **To attempt to place the jewel of redemption in a setting of the world’s wisdom is to rob the temple of idols. It is to defile the temple of God.** It is something that nullifies the power of the Gospel and makes the cross of Christ of *“none effect.”* Peter said, *“For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (2 Pet 1:16).

There is a phenomenal amount of this kind of thing in the Christian world. Whether it is in the area of motivation, organization, presentation, or professed scholarship, **the manners of the world are being employed to promote the Gospel and make disciples.** It is not

acceptable! The realm God has rejected is not a well from which professed believers may draw!

Sacrilegious Offerings

Sacrilege also takes place when defiled and unacceptable offerings are presented to God. Again, Israel provides us with a concrete example of such sacrifices. Their offerings, because of their deficiency, actually incensed the Lord. *“And when you offer the blind as a sacrifice, Is it not evil? And when you offer the lame and sick, Is it not evil? Offer it then to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you favorably? Says the LORD of hosts . . . But cursed be the deceiver Who has in his flock a male, And takes a vow, But sacrifices to the Lord what is blemished; For I am a great King, says the LORD of hosts, and My name is to be feared among the nations”^{NKJV} (Mal 1:8,14).*

Today, it is exceedingly difficult to find a congregation, or even a person, that is offering their very best to the Lord. Every Lord’s day, people gather to offer to God the dregs of their intellect, emotion, and will. They have expended their energies in worldly pursuits, and now offer God what is left.

In keeping with its marriage with the world, the professed church structures its program to accommodate such pretension.

The average gathering of believers does not require much from them, but is convenient for the flesh. It is a more serious matter than some think.

Profaning the Holy

through the temple. He was acutely aware that what had been given to God was not to be used for ordinary purposes. It was sacrilege.

In our day, this frame of mind is

Integral to this text is the fact that a lack of the righteousness of God shuts men up to inconsistent religion. The flesh will not allow a person or a group who refuses God’s righteousness to be spiritually consistent.

Jesus soundly rebuked those who defiled God’s temple by driving them out of it. The incident is most arresting. *“So they came to Jerusalem. Then Jesus went into the temple and began to drive out those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. And He would not allow anyone to carry wares through the temple. Then He taught, saying to them, Is it not written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations’? But you have made it a ‘den of thieves’” (Matt 11:15-17).*

Notice, Jesus did not even allow people to carry wares, or useful equipment, through the temple. That would be like forbidding people to carry their shopping bags or cooking utensils

almost unknown. A consciousness of God, together with a commitment to purity, is not at all common. People have been lulled to sleep by counterfeit religion, not aware that their religious offerings actually anger God. They are guilty of sacrilege. Were this single perception to be grasped by the modern church, it would violently interrupt its entire program.

Shut up to Inconsistency

Integral to this text is the fact that a lack of the righteousness of God shuts men up to inconsistent religion. The flesh will not allow a person or a group who refuses God’s righteousness to be spiritually consistent. Flesh is not capable of pleasing God, and those who remain in its power are also incapable of pleasing Him. In fact, they will only anger Him. We must have God’s righteousness.

BOASTING IN THE LAW

“²³You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law?” Remember, the Kingdom of God ONLY allows for boasting, or glorying, in the Lord. As it is written, *“But he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord”* (2 Cor 10:17). Salvation is so structured as to exclude all other boasting. *“God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: [in order] **That** no flesh should glory in his presence. But of*

*him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: [in order] **That**, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord”* (1 Cor 1:27-31).

Here the nature of the flesh is again confirmed. Although the Jews were given every possible fleshly advantage, yet they gloried in the Law instead of the Lord who gave it. That is the nature of the flesh, in which *“no good thing”* can be found (Rom 7:18). That simply is what it does.

BOASTING IN THE LAW

The Jews did not boast in the content of the Law, or that it was the Law of God. Rather, they boasted in their possession of it, as though having it made them acceptable with God. Jeremiah said it this way, *“How can you say, ‘We are wise, and the law of the LORD is with us’”* (Jer 8:8). Jesus said it this way, *“Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life”* (John 5:40).

The Jews boasted that they had a Law from God, and other nations did not. They had scribes who were expert in the text of Scripture itself. They were familiar with the Law, and could talk about it,

Even with all of the advantages given to them by God, the Jews still needed a righteousness from Him, by Given O. Blakely

even enforcing it upon others.

In a sense, they had made an idol out of the Law, admitting to its value, yet not letting it bring them to conviction and Christ. It is much like the way they viewed the brazen serpent, through which many were healed in the plague of fiery, or poisonous, serpents. When Hezekiah became king, he took the idols out of the land. At that time, we learn how the Israelites had viewed the brazen serpent. *“He removed the high places and broke the sacred pillars, cut down the wooden image and broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made; for until those days the children of Israel burned incense to it, and called it Nehushtan”* ^{NKJV} (2 Kings 18:4). **When one does not possess the righteousness of God, there is a proneness to this sort of conduct.**

For the Jews, sin had so dulled their senses that they made no correlation between a holy Law and holy conduct. They thought it was sufficient to possess the truth without loving and obeying it.

This type of mentality is not as uncommon as some may think. Although it has degenerated from boasting in the Law, or Word of God, the spirit of such boasting is found in sectarianism. It is not unusual to hear people boast of their religious heritage, how they were raised, and the tenets to which they hold. We are not the sons of a religious movement, but of God Almighty. No doctrinal position has sanctified us, and no institution has reconciled us to God. No church father died for us. If any man glory, let him glory in the Lord! No other glorying is allowed.

GOD IS DISHONORED WHEN HIS LAW IS BROKEN

“ . . . through breaking the law dishonorest thou God?” This is not asking if they were dishonoring God. The sense of the text is, “After making your boast in the Law of God, how can you dishonor God by breaking it?” It is an appeal to the human conscience, to awaken it from the slumber induced by pride in appearance, imagining that it gave some sort of eternal advantage.

Having the truth is of no advantage to those who *“do not obey the truth”* (Rom 2:9). To have a working knowledge of the good message of salvation is of no value to those who *“obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (2 Thess 1:8). On a more evident level, a people who preach unity, yet do not practice it, are a discredit to God. A group that teaches holiness holds no advantage if they themselves are not holy. Those who preach salvation in a most precise and procedural manner bring

It is not unusual to hear people boast of their religious heritage, how they were raised, and the tenets to which they hold. We are not the sons of a religious movement, but of God Almighty.

no glory to God if they themselves are not in fellowship with Him.

Not only do men need a righteousness from God, they dishonor Him by their disobedience. As evident as this may appear, Satan has been unusually successful in obscuring this to many.

Take, for example, a doctrine that teaches people are spiritually secure, even though they are morally deficient. A host of passages may be cited to confirm this is the case, convincing people that once their name is written in the Lamb’s book of life, it can never be blotted out. Just as the Jews *“boasted”* in the Law and their national status, these people *“boast”* in their supposed salvation, and their assumed status as *Christians*. But God is *“dishonored”* by their sin, regardless of what they imagine their status to be.

But let us pursue this matter of *“dishonor,”* for the pretended theologian may imagine it to be of no consequence. The Spirit acknowledges that, in a larger sense, God’s *“house”* has dishonorable ones within it. Yet, they are not acceptable people, but those through whom God works, like Pharaoh of old.

There are two passages that deal with this Kingdom reality.

Romans 9:21-22

The first is Romans 9:21-22. *“Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor? What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction.”* The premier example of this is found in Pharaoh, raised up by God to show His power, and declare His name throughout the whole earth (vs 9:17-20).

There is a technical, yet vital, point being made here. First, those who insist on being disobedient and walking in their own way, are still under the government of God. He will use their wickedness for His own purpose. Ultimately, their self-will does not serve themselves, but God. God will be honored through them, but they themselves will be destroyed. Sin will never bring an advantage to the sinner!

The vessel of dishonor is depicted as objecting to Divine judgment. Hearing that God’s will is served even in the disobedience of the wicked, the recalcitrant replies, *“Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?”* (9:19). It is as though one like Pharaoh said, *“If God has gotten honor for Himself through me, why am I condemned. I could not stop His will, but only became a part of it.”* But such a reply is soundly rebuffed by the Lord. *“But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, ‘hy have you made me like this?’ Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor?”* ^{NKJV} (9:20-21). God did not make Pharaoh unrighteous—he was that way by nature, just as surely as were the Israelites. Both were from *“the same lump.”* Yet, God orchestrated the affairs of both Pharaoh and Israel to bring glory to Himself, causing their deeds to bring honor to Him.

Had Pharaoh sought the Lord, or called upon His name, or repented, he

would have been received. The same word given to wicked Cain, applied to him: *“If you do well, will you not be accepted?”* (Gen 4:7). But when men do NOT well, they are NOT accepted, even though God will ultimately be glorified, even through them. Thus it is written, *“For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life. And who is sufficient for these things?”*^{NKJV} (2 Cor 2:15-16).

Like A Great Net

It is in this sense that the Kingdom of God is like a great net, cast into the sea of humanity. *“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet that was cast into the sea and gathered some of every kind, which, when it was full, they drew to shore; and they sat down and gathered the good into vessels, but threw the bad away. So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just, and cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth”*^{NKJV} (Matt 13:46-50).

Notice, **both the wicked and the just were within the net**—under Divine control. Ultimately, they served God’s purpose, not their own. This is one of the ways in which God *“works all things together for our good”* (Rom 8:28).

For professed believers to concoct doctrines that excuse wickedness, or make it appear as though it were inconsequential, is inexcusable. Those who insist on sinning will still be used for God’s ultimate glory, but it will be at the expense of their own salvation.

2 Timothy 2:20-21

The Spirit informs us that within the professed body of Christ, there are people to be avoided. They largely consist of false teachers, who allow for the dominance of flesh. John the beloved said of such people in his day, *“They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us;*

but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us” (1 John 2:19).

Paul referred to such individuals as *“vessels of dishonor,”* affirming they were to be avoided by men, even though they were used by God—used for ignoble purposes. *“But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor. Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work.”*

Paul gives two examples of vessels of *“dishonor”* in this passage. They are

If men continue in sin, it is because they are dominated by the flesh, not by faith in Christ. Further, “they that are in the flesh cannot please God” (Rom 8:8). They dishonor God in their sin, and God will not honor them for it.

“Hymenaeus and Philetus,” whose teaching was like deadly cancer to the church. They taught *“that the resurrection is already past,”* and consequently *“overthrew the faith of some”* (vs 17-18). Their wickedness, however, did not overthrow the purpose of God. *“Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: ‘The Lord knows those who are His,’ and, ‘Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity’”* (v 19).

The *“eternal purpose”* of God is not overthrown by the wicked. Their own wickedness, however, will exclude them from all of its benefits. Their destruction will not be diverted even if they accompanied with, and went out from, the Apostles themselves, like those of John’s day. Even though they are influential teachers in the church, like Hymenaeus

and Philetus, they will not escape.

Not A Diversion

All of this is NOT a diversion from our subject. I have shown that dishonoring God is NOT something allowed among His children. Furthermore, only His remission and the conferment of His righteousness can remove such dishonor. There is no advantage to having the truth of God if men still dishonor God. In fact, salvation delivers men from lives that dishonor the Lord. His own righteousness demanded such a resolution.

GOD IS NOT UNRIGHTEOUS

I must pursue this subject further. The Spirit is confirming our absolute need of the righteousness of God. He is showing us that no amount of external advantage can qualify us for Divine acceptance. Even when God separates a people for Himself, showers upon them unparalleled favors, gives them His own holy Law, and subdues their enemies before Him—those benefits cannot change their nature. In giving all of those blessings, the Lord only confirmed the sinfulness of the people. They needed a righteousness from God.

Galatians 2:17-19

This truth, however, is not easily appropriated. Men continue to imagine they are sanctified by having the truth instead of walking in it (3 John 3). Therefore, the Spirit reasons with us. *“But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is Christ therefore a minister of sin? Certainly not! For if I build again those things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor. For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God”*^{NKJV} (Gal 2:17-19).

The point of this passage is that **Christ cannot foster sin**. Sin never is the result of fellowship with Christ! Jesus never leads a person to dishonor God. Jesus came to *“destroy the works of the devil”* (1 John 3:8), **not** to allow them to spring up in His people. Men may find it reasonable to explain sin, but God does not. He has already explained sin, and it

Even with all of the advantages given to them by God, the Jews still needed a righteousness from Him, by Given O. Blakely

needs no further explanation. It flows from what we are by nature, not what we are by grace. If men continue in sin, it is because they are dominated by the flesh, not by faith in Christ. Further, *“they that are in the flesh cannot please God”* (Rom 8:8). They dishonor God in their sin, and God will not honor them for it.

Under the Law, sin broke forth, awakened by the Law that was contrary to defiled human nature. Thus it is written, *“I was alive once without the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died. And the commandment, which was to bring life, I found to bring death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed me”* (Rom 7:8-11).

Rather than the Law giving those possessing it a reason to boast, it brought

out how defiled their nature was. Sin had put man at variance with God. He was *“alienated”* from God, an *“enemy”* of God, and unable, in his own power, to please Him. To boast, therefore, in having the Law, was the height of absurdity.

While the Law stimulated sin, however, the righteousness of God does not. The grace of God does not yield the results found in the Law. It will never encourage or condone sin—never! Further, where God is dishonored, no association with grace can be professed. It is the flesh that has produced the dishonor, and remission and reconciliation must be sought diligently. Personally dishonoring God and causing others to dishonor Him exclude people from Divine acceptance.

This all confirms the need for a righteousness from God. **All boasting**

that is not in God is wrong. It cannot be justified, and must be abandoned. If the Jews could not boast in the God-given law, how foolish it must appear in heaven for Gentiles to boast in their religious heritage! I realize this is common, but it is strictly forbidden by both the Word and nature of the Living God.

In salvation, men are extricated from the flesh, or their natural condition, not made more firm in it. The Jews were, so to speak, the best of all *“flesh,”* and yet they needed a righteousness from God. Their **ONLY** distinction was what the Lord had done to and for them. And yet, with all of that, they were still unrighteous. **Until a righteousness from God is received, men will only bring dishonor to God.** The Gospel, under the convincing power of the Spirit, will confirm that to tender hearts.

THE NAME OF GOD BLASPHEMED BECAUSE OF THOSE IDENTIFIED WITH HIM

²⁴For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you, as it is written. Here is a tragic circumstance—God’s name defamed because of those identified with Him! The Jews, who were custodians of the revelation of God, actually brought dishonor to Him among the heathen. Isaiah referred to this condition. *“Now therefore, what have I here, saith the LORD, that my people is taken away for nought? they that rule over them make them to howl, saith the LORD; and My name continually every day is blasphemed”* (Isa 52:5).

The idea of this passage is that Israel was oppressed by the Assyrians and Chaldeans. Yet these hostile nations had no earthly claim on Israel. They were only used of God to punish His people for their wickedness. Still, the heathen blasphemed God every day because of the Jews—because of the weakness and reproach their own sin had brought upon them. Had the Israelites been righteous, the Assyrians and Chaldeans would not have conquered them, and God’s name would not have been blasphemed, despised, or cursed.

Ezekiel also mentions the matter of God’s name being dishonored among the heathen because of Israel. In my judgment, this is the specific passage to which our text refers. *“When they came to the nations, wherever they went, they profaned My holy name; when they said of*

The name of God was *“blasphemed”* as the heathen boasted that their gods had overcome the God of the Hebrews, who had parted the Red Sea. They concluded because God did not rescue His people He was too weak to do so. The heathen were prone to think this way,

When the name of God is blasphemed because of those wearing His name, it is because of their unbelief, addiction to sin, and their failure to appropriate the righteousness of God. It will do no good to spout religious slogans and doctrinal positions. If the flesh dominates the people, it is because they have NOT received the righteousness of God.

them, ‘These are the people of the LORD, and yet they have gone out of His land.’ But I had concern for My holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the nations wherever they went. Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord GOD: ‘I do not do this for your sake, O house of Israel, but for My holy name’s sake, which you have profaned among the nations wherever you went’” (Ezek 36:20-22). Think: profaning God’s name! The very words cause the soul to shudder.

whether the Jews were unfaithful or not. This was the challenge Pharaoh hurled into the face of Moses. *“Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the LORD, neither will I let Israel go”* (Ex 5:2). When wicked Sennacherib wrote to Hezekiah, he said, *“Let not thy God in whom thou trustest deceive thee, saying, Jerusalem shall not be delivered into the hand of the king of Assyria. Behold, thou hast heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands, by destroying them utterly: and shalt thou be*

delivered? Have the gods of the nations delivered them which my fathers have destroyed; as Gozan, and Haran, and Rezeph, and the children of Eden which were in Thelasar? Where is the king of Hamath, and the king of Arpad, and the king of the city of Sepharvaim, of Hena, and Ivah?" (2 Kgs 19:10-13).

It should not surprise us, therefore, that the heathen speak reproachfully of the Living God. **However, when it is done because of the misconduct of His people, that is quite another matter.**

Before developing this further, I want to affirm this condition reveals a need for a righteousness from God. **When the name of God is blasphemed because of those wearing His name, it is because of their unbelief, addiction to sin, and their failure to appropriate the righteousness of God.** It will do no good to spout religious slogans and doctrinal positions. If the flesh dominates the people, it is because they have NOT received the righteousness of God. They are NOT living by faith. Their profession is inconsequential, and utterly without worth. These are strong assertions, to be sure, but I will show they are the truth.

A WORD FROM JESUS

Jesus spoke of offenses, or stumbling blocks, that would be cast before men. *"Woe to the world because of offenses! For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes!"* (Matt 18:7). Lest we think this to be a mild word, remember that all who cause offense will be removed from God's Kingdom. As it is written, *"The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness"*^{NKJV} (Matt 13:41). This is precisely why Jesus upbraided the scribes and Pharisees (Matt 23:13-28).

Immediately preceding this verse (Matt 18:7), Jesus spoke of those who cause even the youngest to be offended. *"But whoso shall offend one of these little*

ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea" (Matt 18:6). That certainly confirms the gravity of the situation.

It is possible for a person, or even a group, to become a stumbling block—for their words and conduct to cause people to stumble when they hear of God or Christ. Solemnly, believers are told to see to it

As soon as we depend upon our own righteousnesses, which are as "filthy rags" (Isa 64:6), we subject the name of the Lord to shame. We should not balk at this, for Jesus has already told us, "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing"

they do not place a "stumbling block" in their "brother's way" (Rom 14:13). Their liberty is not to become "become a stumbling block to those who are weak" (1 Cor 8:9).

Our text takes the matter even further, showing that the name of the Lord is often blasphemed among those who do **not** know Him BECAUSE of those professing to be His people. Suffice it to say, if the name of the Lord is reproached, it had better not be because of us! Because considerable attention is given to this matter in Scripture, it will be profitable to consider it.

YOUNGER WOMEN AND WIVES

Two admonitions are given to young wives and mothers to zealously avoid giving an occasion for outsiders to speak reproachfully of God and His word. *"Therefore I desire that the younger*

widows marry, bear children, manage the house, give no opportunity to the adversary to speak reproachfully" (1 Tim 5:14). This solemn admonition is preceded by alerting younger widows of the liabilities of idleness. *"And besides they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house, and not only idle but also gossips and busybodies, saying things which they ought not"* (v. 14). That condition would result in Christ's adversaries speaking reproachfully of Him, His word, and His people. With zeal, this is to be avoided.

The spirit also addresses women that are already married, admonishing the older and more mature women to assist the younger ones in God-honoring conduct. *"That they [the older women] may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed"* (Tit 2:4-5).

THOSE WITH MASTERS

After being joined to the Lord, some saints remained under the yoke of slavery. While the circumstance was certainly not ideal, those within it were to live and serve in an exemplary manner. *"Let as many bondservants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and His doctrine may not be blasphemed"* (1 Tim 6:1). The enemies of God look for an occasion to speak reproachfully of God's Person and teaching. If those "under the yoke" of slavery are to zealously avoid causing this to happen, what of those who are free? It seems to me that an even greater responsibility is placed upon them. As it is written, *"as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God"* (1 Pet 2:16). And again, *"For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another"* (Gal 1:13).

DAVID'S EXPERIENCE

One of the great tragedies of

Scripture is when David sinned with Bathsheba. Due to the mercy of God, David did recover from this terrible sin. As it is written, *“David did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, and had not turned aside from anything that He commanded him all the days of his life, except in the matter of Uriah the Hittite”* (1 Kgs 15:5). A word of caution ought to be given to those who feel at liberty to speak of the many sins of David. This is the word of the Spirit concerning him, and it is the height of foolishness to contradict it with some humanistic view of the man after God’s own heart.

Even though recovery was realized, yet David had caused the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme. Because of this, the child born out of that iniquity died. Here was God’s word to David. *“However, because by this deed you have given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also who is born to you shall surely die”* (2 Sam 12:14). The seriousness of causing the *“enemies of the Lord”* to blaspheme is evident.

How is it that such things can occur? It is not because of God’s righteousness, but because of our natural corruption. We need His righteousness! As soon as we depend upon our own righteousnesses, which are as *“filthy rags”* (Isa 64:6), we subject the name of the Lord to shame. We should not balk at this, for Jesus has already told us, *“I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing”* (John 15:5).

Whether men like it or not, God is judged by what men see in His people. When we let our light shine, they will behold our *“good works,”* and glorify our Father in heaven (Matt 5:16).

DEMEANING THOUGHTS OF GOD

Demeaning thoughts of God ARE largely owing to the inconsistencies of those wearing His name. Who among us has not confronted irreverent views of caused by such. A considerable point of this is made in the book of Revelation, and is worthy of some comment.

In my judgment, we are living in the midst of spiritually perilous times. It is a time when a form of godliness is embraced, while its power is rejected. Not only is there a corruption in doctrine, but appetites are cultured for the things of this world. Legion is the name of those who have a worldly view of preaching, music, leadership, and evangelism. This type of religion was astounding for the Apostles to consider.

When John was given to see the great *“harlot,”* which is the false church, he marveled at its appearance and power. Here is the record. *“Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and talked with me, saying to me, ‘Come, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters, with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication.’ So he carried me away in the Spirit into the wilderness. And I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast which*

In my judgment, we are living in the midst of spiritually perilous times. It is a time when a form of godliness is embraced, while its power is rejected. Not only is there a corruption in doctrine, but appetites are cultured for the things of this world.

was full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication. And on her forehead a name was written: MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. And when I saw her, I

marveled with great amazement” (Rev 17:1-6). There are several things here that are of particular significance.

1. The vision is of a woman.
2. The kings of the earth commit fornication with her.
3. The inhabitants of the earth are made drunk with the wine of her fornication.
4. She is carried along by associations with blasphemy.
5. The woman is arrayed with royal garments.
6. In her hand is a cup filled with abominations, which are directly related to her fornication.
7. Her name indicates her true character is not apparent.
8. She begets harlots.
9. She is the cause of the abominations in the earth.
10. She has advanced her cause at the expense of the blood of the saints and the martyrs of Jesus.

This is an arresting picture of the false church—Satan’s fabrication. That is why it is associated with fornication. She comes in the name of Christ, yet has chosen to commit spiritual fornication with the world. Both the rulers and the inhabitants of the earth are affected by her presence and manners. Boldly, this corrupt form of religion has even shed the blood of the saints of God in order to advance her own ways.

This form of *Christianity* was first advanced on a large scale by the Roman Catholic church. For many centuries, this was not acknowledged by its leaders. However, we have lived to see a significant admission of guilt by the Pope himself. On March 12, 2000, in a mild yet epochal confession Pope John Paul said, *“We are asking pardon for the divisions among Christians, for the use of violence that some have committed in the service of truth, and for attitudes of mistrust and hostility assumed toward followers of other religions.”*^{Victor L. Simpson, Associated Press}

Historians estimate that over 50,000,000 Protestants were slain by the

Roman Church during those bloody years. But that is only the tip of the iceberg. She pioneered an alliance with the governments of this world, and helped to usher in State religion. Her strength was found in her form, or organization. Whether in its ceremonies, officials, or ornate cathedrals, appearance was vaunted above substance.

From this type of religion came a host of spiritual harlots. A heterogenous mixture of heaven and earth and flesh and Spirit was attempted. It survives to this day, and is unusually rampant in our time. This is form without power (2 Tim 3:5). It is a religion that allows for men to come in sheep's clothing, who are ravening wolves within (Matt 7:15).

Mother of the Earth's Abominations

At this point we can see a correlation with our text. The corrupt church is the mother of spiritual harlots promoting a coalition with the world under the guise of religion. But that is not all. She also is the mother of "the abominations of the earth," promoting corruption even among those who do not know the Lord. The world is actually worse because of polluted religion. The name of God is thus

blasphemed in both word and conduct because of professed followers of Christ. It is too evident to deny.

This situation reveals a critical need for a righteousness from God! The

occur in religion, and the name of the Lord be blasphemed among the heathen because of it. There is no alternative to this indispensable righteousness. The Jews are an indisputable case in point. If they, after all of the unique benefits they

There is only one thing that can correct this condition. That is a righteousness from God. Where this is not found, it is inevitable that corruption will occur in religion, and the name of the Lord be blasphemed among the heathen because of it. There is no alternative to this indispensable righteousness.

corruption of reference proceeded from corrupt people. Corrupt deeds can only come from a corrupt source. It is ever true, "Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree **cannot** bear bad fruit, **nor can a bad tree bear good fruit**" (Matt 7:17-18). The Lord has stated conditions that are impossible—they cannot happen!

There is only one thing that can correct this condition. That is a righteousness from God. Where this is not found, it is inevitable that corruption will

received, were unable to avoid this circumstance, nothing more needs to be said to justify the Spirit's conclusion. **Men need a righteousness from God!** That is precisely why the Gospel announces it is available through Christ Jesus.

No other form of goodness or imagined intellectual superiority will be acknowledged by God. At some point, human efforts must be abandoned in favor of believing God. The condition of the modern church is proof enough that this is the case.

CONCLUSION

This text has been usually strong, as the nature of truth has been expounded. The Gospel has revealed a righteousness from God, and it is one that is required. The modern church has become so used to philosophical and psychological preaching, that it can scarcely bare to hear a firm word from God.

The Spirit has shown from their idolatry, deep immorality, and wicked expressions, that the Gentiles could not arrive at a righteousness of their own. He has confirmed that the testimony of nature could not awaken any purported goodness within man. Nor, indeed, could his wisdom retrieve him from the fall, change his nature, or make him righteous.

The well of human wisdom is not deep enough to produce life-giving water.

Those who draw from it will find it is a "broken cisterns that can hold no water" (Jer 2:13). Natural powers of analysis cannot bring men to the proper conclusions, or compel to act effectively upon what glimmers of truth they see, whether in nature or in Law. When left to himself, man descends into the bottomless pit of flesh. This is a hard truth for proud man to learn, but it must be learned.

Turning to the Jews, the Spirit wields His sword with unparalleled effectiveness. He shows that man has fallen so far that surrounding him with Divine benefits will not change his nature. As confirmed in the most privileged nation in the history of the world, heavenly gifts only served to establish man's need for a righteousness from God. Without grace, they availed nothing.

Given an elite status and a flawless Law, behold what happened. The Jews rested in form, and cared nothing for the substance. They became arrogant, as though they had achieved their status through their own efforts. They gave no heed to the festering eruptions of iniquity within them, and settled for a whitewashed appearance. Whether or not men argue about the possibility of avoiding such a condition, the fact is that it was NOT avoided.

It is true, there were holy men here and there who rose above their peers. Before the Son of God entered into this defiled world, the sons of men had some noble representatives. Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, and the holy Prophets, and John the Baptist stand as giants among the offspring of Adam. But

Even with all of the advantages given to them by God, the Jews still needed a righteousness from Him, by Given O. Blakely

not a single one of them would boast of their achievement! None of them, however, would claim a righteousness of their own making, or trace their success to their own wisdom. Faith made them superior! They all recognized their need of the Lord, righteousness, and Divine direction.

O, that men could see it! Apart from the righteousness of God, men are shut up to inconsistency. Worse than that, their supposed righteousness is summarily

rejected by God. He will have none of it. They must be *"made the righteousness of God"* in Christ Jesus (2 Cor 5:21). That is something God does, not man!

Those who have some representation of truth, yet do not have the righteousness of God, will tend to think they are exclusive, sitting in judgment upon others. I have come from this type of heritage, and its fruits are too abundant to contest. Of all religious bodies, those who imagine themselves to be the exclusive people of

God, or to have a monopoly upon the truth of God, are the worst. That is precisely why Jesus said to the pious chief priests and elders, *"Verily I say unto you, That the publican and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you"* (Matt 21:31).

When division, hatred, and lifelessness are spawned in a religious environment, it is because the righteousness of God has not been received. This is the message of our text.

Our next Hungry Saints Meeting will be held on Friday, 4/7/2000. Continuing in our studies on Romans, we will cover 2:25-29: **REAL CIRCUMCISION.** Because of the atoning death and consequent exaltation of Christ, the reign of flesh has ended. Identity with God is no longer be confirmed in the flesh. Flesh has no value, and cannot be salvaged. A new nature is needed—one that can only be accomplished through Divine surgery. This is the day of salvation, when the nature of men is changed by the grace of God. Our meeting will convene at 7:00 P.M. You are invited to bring your family and friends for fellowship around the Word of God.

*The Blakely Family: Given, June, Benjamin, Jonathan, and Eva
406 South Sergeant Street, Joplin, MO 64801*

Telephone: (417) 782-3063, **Email:** Given (GivenB@aol.com) June: (JuneE01@aol.com)
Benjamin (Bensvison@aol.com), Jonathan (Jonstalk@aol.com), Eva (Evablakely@aol.com)
Adah Hutchcraft (jahutch@myway.com)

WORD OF TRUTH Website: <http://wotruth.com>

Word of Truth Fellowship Website: <http://wotruth.com/wotf/wotindex.htm>