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The Religious Jew's Lack of Obedience 2: 17-24

The religious Jew's lack of obedience DIG: How did rabbinic Judaism and the Oral Law, distort God's original intent of the Torah? What did they learn? In what four areas does the religious Jew consider himself to be a spiritually superior teacher? What three areas revealed their spiritual and moral hypocrisy? Instead of special treatment, what did God's blessings actually give to the Jews?

REFLECT: Instead of special treatment, what have God's blessings actually given to you? Without having to be perfect, how do you view your obedience to ADONAI? What needs to change? Anything gets between you and God, He wants out of the way. Do you put anything before God? Your family? Your job? Your spouse? Yourself? Why?

Jewish privileges brought on certain responsibilities; however, these privileges do not prove the Jews righteousness. Only faith in Yeshua brings righteousness.

The religious **Jew** boasted in **the Torah**. **He** was different from the **Gentile** pagan who worshiped idols (**to see link click Ak – The Pagan Gentile**), or the "good person" (see **Ao – The "Good Person"**). **Paul** made it clear that it was not the *possession* of **the Torah** that counted, but the *obedience* to **the Torah** that mattered. Religious **Jews** looked upon the pagan **Gentiles** and the "good person" as **blind**, in **darkness**, foolish, immature, and ignorant. But if **YHVH** found the **Gentile** pagan and the "good person" guilty, how much more guilty were the "privileged" **Jews**? **Paul** is making the same point as Moshe: **Circumcise your heart** (see the commentary on **Deuteronomy Cn – Circumcise Your Hearts**).



1. What they learned: But since you call yourself a Jew and rely on Torah and boast about God and know His will and give your approval to what is right, because you have been instructed from the Torah, nevertheless, you cannot claim any superiority on this basis **(2:17-18)**. Because rabbinic Judaism had corrupted **the Torah** to an outward observance, and hence the futile attempt to keep all 613 mitzvot, some rabbis began teaching that merely *learning* the mitzvot was sufficient to please **YHVH**. Weakening the purpose even further, some taught that the mere **possession** of it, in the form of written scrolls, was adequate. Still others believed **the Jews** were safe from **God's** judgment simply because, as **a people**, **they** were the special *recipients* and *custodians* of **the Torah**.

*Dear Loving Heavenly **Father**, Praise **You** that **Your love** for us is not merely an outward observance, but a real and genuine, deep and forever l**ove**! **You** ask the same of us**. And He said to him, "'You shall love ADONAI your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' (Matthew 22:39, Mark 12:30, Luke 10:27).** Thank **You** that entrance into your Heavenly Kingdom will not be by words nor by actions that people do.* ***Not everyone who says to Me, '"Lord, Lord!" will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me on that day, "Lord, Lord, didn't we prophesy in Your name, and drive out demons in Your name, and perform many miracles in Your name?" Then I will declare to them, "I never knew you. Get away from Me, you workers of lawlessness" (Matthew 7:21-23)!***

*Entrance to your eternal kingdom of **love** and peace is for all who move beyond just saying they believe, and also have a heart full of **love** for you that prompts them to do actions to show their **love** of **Yeshua** as their **Lord** and **Savior**. **For if you confess with your mouth that Yeshua is Lord, and believe in your heart***

that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart it is believed for righteousness, and with the mouth it is confessed for salvation (Romans 10:9-10). *"True l**ove** from the Heart" is the key to heaven! In your holy **Son's** name and power of **His** resurrection. Amen*

The TaNaKh makes its purpose quite clear, however, and it repeatedly warns against placing any trust in outward ceremonies and objects, even those such as **the** Levitical **sacrifices** and **the Temple** itself, which **Ha'Shem** had ordained (see the commentary on **Jeremiah Cc – False Religion is Worthless**). Self-righteous and presumptuous, rabbinic Judaism became satisfied to simply **know the will** of **ADONAI**, without **obeying it**. **They** learned what **YHVH** required and what **He** forbade, what **He** commanded and what **He** prohibited, what **He** rewarded and what **He** punished. But rather than saving **them**, that knowledge became a judgment against **them**, because **they** refused to live by it and refused to accept the remedy for such failure.[55]

2. What they taught: Jews not only felt secure in what **they knew**, but also in what **they taught**. Considering **themselves** the most religiously wise, **they** naturally thought **themselves** to be the most competent teachers of **the spiritually unaware**, namely, **the Gentiles**, who did not have the benefit of **the Torah**. But, **Isra'el's** continued unfaithfulness to **God** and disobedience of **His** Word disqualified her as an example and teacher to them. And even when **the Jews** made an occasional convert to Judaism, **they** made the Gentile convert worse off than he was before. **Woe to you hypocritical Torah-teachers and Pharisees, Yeshua said. You go about over land and sea to make one proselyte, and when you succeed, you make him twice as fit for Gei-Hinnom as you are (Matthew 23:15)!** Instead of leading **Gentiles** to trust **the One true God** and become **obedient** to **His** will, the **Jewish** leaders indoctrinated converts into **the Oral Law** (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Ei – The Oral Law**). Paul then mentions **four areas** in which religious **Jews** considered **themselves** spiritually superior **teachers**.

> **First, Paul** said: **You have persuaded yourself that you are a guide to the blind (2:19a).** The religious **Jew** considered **himself** to be a superior mentor of the community in spiritual and moral matters. **He** saw **himself** as **a** religious **guide**, to **the** unlearned **Jew**, but especially to **the blind** Gentile pagans. Because of **their** arrogant pride and blatant hypocrisy, **Messiah** charged **them** with being **blind guides (Matthew 23:24-28)**. Far from being qualified to **guide** others, **they** were **themselves** in desperate need of

guidance.

Second, Paul notes that the religious **Jew** considered **himself to be a light to the Gentiles** who were **in the darkness (2:19b).** Ironically, that was the role that **YHVH** had intended for **Isra'el**. **Moses** had pointed to the fact that **all the families of the earth will be blessed** by **her (Genesis 12:3b)**. Then **Isaiah** elaborated even further when **he** said: **I, ADONAI, called you righteously, I took hold of you by the hand, I shaped you and made you a covenant of the people, to be a light to the Gentiles (Isaiah 42:6).** But **the Jews** fell far short of **their** lofty responsibility.

Yeshua declares us to be **the light of the world** and charges us to put our **light on a lampstand**, where it can be seen and will do some good. **Let your light shine before people, so that they may see the good things you do and praise your Father in heaven (Matthew 5:14-16).** That has always been **Ha'Shem's** intention for **His** people. **He** gives us **light** not only for our own spiritual benefit, but also for the benefit of the rest of the world, before whom we are **His** witnesses.

Third, the religious **Jew** prided **himself** as being **an instructor for the spiritually unaware (2:20a)**. Once again, the primary focus was **the spiritually unaware Gentiles**, even the wisest of whom were considered to be foolish in the area of **the Torah** and **the Oral Law**.

Fourth, the religious **Jew** thought of **himself** as **a teacher of children** in the faith, or in the context here, Gentile proselytes to **Judaism**, who needed special instruction **(2:20b)**. **They** needed to learn **Torah**, but **they** also needed to rid **themselves** of many of the pagan ideas and practices in which **they** had been brought up.[56] **Since the Jews** did have **the Torah, they** actually *did* **have the embodiment of** divine **knowledge and truth (2:20c).** However, **their** understanding, teaching, and modeling **it** had become so overshadowed by the Oral Law, what **Yeshua** called **the traditions of the elders (Mark 7:3)**, that the true benefit of **the Torah** as **God's** blueprint for living (see the commentary on **Exodus Dh – Moses and the Torah**), was largely unknown and disregarded.

3. What they did: Paul's contention here is that even when the religious **Jew** taught the truth, they taught it hypocritically. Just as **the Adversary** sometimes disguises **himself as an angel of light (Second Corinthians 11:14)**, false

teachers sometimes teach the truth for their own selfish ends. **Then, you who teach others, don't you teach yourself (2:21a)? Paul** mentions **three areas** of **their** spiritual and moral hypocrisy: **stealing**, **adultery**, and **idolatrous acts**.

> **Stealing:** By asking a series of questions, **Paul** showed that **the** religious **Jew,** who had **the Torah**, totally failed to comprehend the responsibilities that came with possessing **it. He** taught others, but **he** failed to teach **himself. Preaching, "Thou shalt not steal"** (see the commentary on **Deuteronomy Bs – Do Not Steal**), **do you steal (2:21b)?** Despite the clear mitzvot against stealing, it was very common in ancient Isra'el. Isaiah rebuked those who **turn to their own way, each one intent on his own gain (Isaiah 56:11). Ezeki'el** denounced those who **take bribes to shed blood . . . demand and accept interest on loans, and in greed you make profits off your neighbors by extorting them (Ezeki'el 22:12). Amos** wrote of those who **stole** by making **the bushel smaller and the shekel bigger with dishonest scales (Amos 8:5 NASB). Malachi** even accused some of **his** fellow **Jews** of **robbing** from **YHVH** by withholding some of **the tithes and offerings** owed **Him (Malachi 3:8-9)**.
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> When **Yeshua** cleansed **the Temple** during the last week of **His** earthly ministry, **He** accused the sons of Annus the high priest of making **His Father's house a den of robbers (Matthew 21:13)**. On another occasion **Messiah** was cutting in **His** condemnation of **the Torah-teachers** and **Pharisees** – the self-appointed authorities on righteousness – **for swallowing up widow's houses while making a show of praying at great length (Matthew 23:14).**
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> **Adultery: Saying, "Thou shalt not commit adultery"** (see the commentary on **Deuteronomy Br – Do Not Commit Adultery**), **do you commit adultery (2:22a)?** As with **stealing**, the clear implication is that **they** practiced the very evil **they** condemned in others. Many religious **Jews** tried to get around the **Torah's** mitzvah against **adultery** by divorcing **their wives** and marrying another **woman** whom they were attracted to. But **Yeshua** declared that divorce and remarriage on any grounds other than adultery and desertion resulted in adultery, just as surely as if no divorce had occurred (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Ij – Is It Lawful for a Man to Divorce His Wife?**). **Adultery** can even be committed without the physical act: **A man who even looks at a woman with the purpose of lusting after her has already committed adultery with her in his heart**

(Matthew 5:28).[57]

Do you think **Paul** was being too harsh on **the Jews**? Consider this: in the first century the rabbis had decided that the prohibition against **adultery** and the sentence of stoning for adulterers should be disregarded because there were so many **adulteries**. There was so much **adultery** going around, that **the rabbis** decided they couldn't do anything about it![58]

Idolatrous acts: The third area of hypocrisy related to **committing idolatrous acts**. **Detesting idols** (see **Deuteronomy Bm – Do Not Make Idols**)**, do you commit idolatrous acts** by stealing money, whether by themselves or by others, from the pagan temples **(2:22b)?** With pointed contrast to the hatred of **idols** on which **the** religious **Jew** prided **himself**, this is certainly the last offense of which we should have expected that **he** would be guilty of, knowing the care with which **he** shunned all contact with **idolatry**. **He** may, however, have thought the plunder from pagan **temples** as fair game. At any rate, it is clear that this charge was commonly brought against **the Jews**. In **Acts 19:37**, **the city clerk** of **Ephesus** acquitted **Paul** and **his** companions, by saying: **You have brought these men here who have neither robbed the temple nor insulted your goddesses. Josephus also (Antiquities 1v. 8 and 10) quotes as a principle of the Torah, "Let no one blaspheme those gods which other cities esteem such; nor may any one steal what belongs to strange temples; nor take away the gifts that are dedicated to any god."**[59]

4. What they caused: You who take such pride in Torah, do you, by disobeying the Torah, dishonor God (2:23)? The result of **Jewish** lack of obedience to **the Torah** described here is that, far from being a **light to the Gentiles (Isaiah 42:6** and **49:6)**, as **they** are supposed to be, **they** plunge **the Gentiles** further into darkness, causing **them** to harden **their** hearts: **As it says in the TaNaKh, "For it is because of you that God's name is blasphemed by the Goyim" (Romans 24:24; Isaiah 52:5). The Gentiles** had daily contact with **the Jews** in business and other activities, and **they** were not fooled by **the Jew's** lack of obedience to **the Torah**. The very **Torah** that **the Jews** claimed to **obey** only indicted **them**! One may add that the same accusation can be made of some who call themselves Christians, but lead lives that shame **God,** they cause **Jewish people** to despise **their Messiah** and distance **themselves** even further from the saving power of the gospel. Fortunately, **God's** truth does not depend on them, and

there are others whose lives are a better testimony.[60]