

Five Questions of Paul

How the New Testament writers used the Old Testament is a fascinating subject. Previously taught was the correspondence between Genesis 34 (the rape of Dinah narrative) and John 4 (the Samaritan woman at the well narrative). Here in the book of Romans, Paul has gone back to the book of Deuteronomy to refer to instructions from Moses. The Jews hold Moses in very high regard. Deuteronomy is about living life as a believer. It is not about how to be “saved.”

Deuteronomy 4-5 → Romans 2:21-23

The five questions of Paul are rhetorical questions aimed at the self-righteous Jew using Deuteronomy as a backdrop. These questions are rhetorical in that they all expect a positive answer. Yes, you do these things. You claim to follow the Law while breaking it.

The Five Questions of Romans chapter 2:

1. You who teach another, do you not teach yourself? (verse 21)
2. You who preach that one shall not steal, do you steal? (Verse 21)
3. You who say that one should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? (Verse 22)
4. You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? (Verse 22)
5. You who boast in the Law through your breaking the Law, do you dishonor God? (Verse 23)

Look at these questions from two perspectives.

First, these are commands contained in the Law, specifically, the Ten Commandments. As it says, they boast in the Law and then break the Law. So of what value is the Law to them? This is the perspective of a Jew looking at another Jew who is commanding observance of the Law but breaking it. More than that, notice that at least three of the questions

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come out of the Ten Commandments. The fifth question is a result of answers to the other questions. The first question is a central theme in the Torah: teach and learn the precepts of the Law.

Second, these are commandments that the Jews espouse and parade before Gentiles. Look at how good our Law is. Then the Gentiles look at them and say, “But you are breaking the Law everyday. Let me cite instances where you overtly break the Law.”

James says something related.

James 2:8 If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing well.

James 2:9 But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.

James 2:10 For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all.

James 2:11 For He who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not commit murder.” Now if you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.

Last week we mentioned Romans 2:21a¹, teaching the Law. We looked at one perspective. That is knowing that the commandments of God are not

¹ The “a” in the Scripture reference means the first part or first half of the verse. The last half of the verse might be referenced as Romans 2:21b.

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sufficient to live the Christian life or in the Old Testament the life of a believer under the Law. The Jews could not keep the Law. The Christians today cannot keep the law of the Spirit on their own. There is a missing ingredient: the empowerment by the Holy Spirit. That comes by faith dependence on the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit that produces the righteous actions in us. This week, we look at “teaching” from a Jewish perspective.

Romans 2:21 you, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that one shall not steal, do you steal?

Teach. No problem with the translation. But these questions bring up prohibitions from the Law. Idols, stealing and adultery which are items in the Ten Commandments. (Exodus 20/Deuteronomy 5:). You see that the Ten Commandments are first given in the book of Exodus. However, they are repeated in the book of Deuteronomy. It is apparent to me that Paul has used Deuteronomy chapters 4-5 as a reference point to make his point in Romans chapter 2. Why Deuteronomy?

Deuteronomy is an important book in the Bible and revered by the Jews. One commentator says:

“As a legal document, Deuteronomy is essentially a national "constitution," or what S. D. McBride has called the "Polity of the Covenant People" ("Polity of the Covenant People: The Book of Deuteronomy," Int 41 [1987] 229-44). Though it contains a series of laws, it is not a law code, but rather a work intended for religious instruction and education in ancient Israel. As such, it is a work of extraordinary literary coherence, poetic beauty, and political sophistication. In short, Deuteronomy represents a very early, and a remarkably comprehensive, attempt to reform and transmit religion by means of a program of religious education in which every person was to

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be included, from the king as the head of the nation to each child in every home (cf. Deut 4:9, 10; 6:7, 20; 11:19; 31:13; 32:7, 46).²”

Deuteronomy chapter 4 has some pointed instructions on teaching. Why this chapter? One Jewish commentator says this about this chapter:

“Chapter 4 is the theological heart of Deuteronomy, explaining its most fundamental precepts, monotheism and the prohibition of idolatry.³”

Sons of Israel from the Exodus were taught by Moses who had received instruction from God Himself.

Deuteronomy 4:1 “Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments which I am teaching you to perform, so that you may live and go in and take possession of the land which the Lord, the God of your fathers, is giving you.

Deuteronomy chapters 1-3 look back at what has already happened. Now in Deuteronomy 4:1, Moses is pointing them to the future. He is teaching them with the implication that they will learn and take to heart his teaching which he received from God directly. Very important is the “so that.” This is a word in the Hebrew indicating purpose. The purpose of this teaching is “so that you may live.” Paul is facing a Jewish opposition that insists that the Law saves. But Paul is showing them that they cannot and are not obeying the Law. The Law is for the believer to continue to live, in the dispensation of the Law.

Then, the Jews were to teach their children

² Christensen, D.L. (2001). Deuteronomy 1 : 1-21:9, revised. Nashville: Nelson Reference & Electronic, Cop. Volume 6, page lvii

³ Tigay, J.H. (1996). The JPS Torah commentary : the traditional Hebrew text with the new JPS translation. Deuteronomy = : [Devarim]. Philadelphia, Pa.: Jewish Publication Society. Page 41

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Deuteronomy 4:9 “Only give heed to yourself and keep your soul diligently, so that you do not forget the things which your eyes have seen and they do not depart from your heart all the days of your life; but make them known to your sons and your grandsons.

Make them known. This is a verb for “to know.” It is in the causative form. The parents are to cause their children to know these things.

But the adults could not teach their children if they were not taught themselves. They were taught by Moses who had been instructed by God Himself.

There is perhaps a key to being Jewish. They teach their children about the Exodus and the history of the Jewish people. Paul is saying that they may have academic knowledge of their Law, but they do not actually understand the Law and its ramifications in their life and culture.

Jews know they must be taught the Law and then they must teach the Law to their children.

Deuteronomy 4:1 → Romans 2:21a

Steal. This is one of the Ten Commandments. At first, I quoted only from Exodus where the Law was first given. I was most familiar with that as the source of the Ten Commandments. But a “second copy” is found in Deuteronomy. As such, what Paul is using as his guide for composing this section of Romans may have been Deuteronomy chapters 4-5.

Exodus 20:15 “You shall not steal.

Deuteronomy 5:19 ‘You shall not steal.

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Deuteronomy 5:19 → Romans 2:21

This is the eighth commandment of the Ten Commandments.

Who are they stealing from? Perhaps from Gentiles. The text does not say. No doubt, the Jews Paul is addressing knew exactly what he was referring to. We do know that Jews sometimes relied on oral tradition to circumvent the requirements of the Law. “Corban” was a way of dedicating wealth to God and the Temple. By doing this, they could withhold money meant to support parents. Although not overtly stealing from parents, the effect was similar. Look at Mark 7 and Jesus accusing Pharisees of doing this.

Mark 7:9 He (Jesus) was also saying to them (Pharisees and Scribes), “You are experts at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition.

Mark 7:10 For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, ‘He who speaks evil of father or mother, is to be put to death’;

Mark 7:11 but you say, ‘If a man says to his father or his mother, whatever I have that would help you is Corban (that is to say, given to God),’

Mark 7:12 you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or his mother;

Mark 7:13 thus invalidating the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down; and you do many things such as that.”

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A commentator on the book of Mark says:

“But by means of the tradition, the responsibility of children to their parents could be easily circumvented (v.11). A son need only declare that what he had intended to give to his father and mother be considered "Corban," i.e., a gift devoted to God; then it could no longer be designated for his parents. By devoting the gift to God, a son did not necessarily promise it to the temple, nor did he prevent its use for himself. What he did do was legally to exclude his parents from benefiting from it (v.12). So the very purpose for which the fifth commandment was given was set aside by the tradition.⁴”

So by declaring wealth as “Corban” (dedicated to God), a tradition and not part of the Mosaic Law, a man could “steal” from his parents.

So in various ways, there were actual examples of what Paul is accusing them of. Now look at the commandment concerning adultery.

**Romans 2:22 You who say that one should not
commit adultery, do you commit adultery?
You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?**

Adultery. Robby Dean refers to an entry in the Talmud concerning adultery in the First Century AD⁵. Apparently, it was a known problem. Something that Gentiles would have noticed.

This is one of the Ten Commandments.

Exodus 20:14 “You shall not commit adultery.

**Deuteronomy 5:18 ‘You shall not commit
adultery.**

4 Longman, T., Garland, D.E., Carson, D.A., Wessel, W.W. and Strauss, M.L. (2010). Matthew & Mark. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan.

5 <https://deanbible.org/new-testament-menuitem/romans-menuitem/download/audio/1708?06618bdc18535b87614cf1bf43c9873d=1>

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Deuteronomy 5:18 → Romans 5:22a

This is the seventh commandment of the Ten Commandments.

Sexual infidelity has plagued Jewish history.

Abraham's wife Sarah was involved in Abraham's infidelity by offering her maid to him. This was a rejection of God's promise to Abraham. Yet, God was faithful even if she and Abraham were not always faithful.

David's infidelity with Bathsheba is well known.

The book of Hosea is about the adultery of Israel. Often, adultery is couched in terms of idolatry. Israel is God's chosen people. So when they turn against Him and go after other gods, it is the same as adultery in God's eyes. This thought leads easily to idolatry.

Idols. Why do Jews abhor idols. First it is a commandment.

Exodus 20:4 “You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth.

Exodus 20:5 You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me,

Exodus 20:6 but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.

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Deuteronomy 5:8 ‘You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth.

Deuteronomy 5:9 You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, and on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me,

Deuteronomy 5:10 but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.

Deuteronomy 5:8-10 → Romans 2:22b

The prohibition against idols is the second commandment of the Ten Commandments.

Additionally, this was a snare to the Israelites in the book of Judges and indeed all through their history in the Old Testament.

The text is suggestive of actual events in which Jews stole idols from pagan temples. It might have been an act of defiance. It could have been to melt down gold in the idols and sell it.

It is suggested that the Jews actually did rob pagan temples for different reasons. Here is an interesting explanation:

“While the practice of robbing pagan temples was “relatively infrequent” in history,[5] it is not without historical precedent (Deut. 7:25-26). Josephus records an incident in AD 19 in Rome, where four Jewish men convinced a Gentile convert (Fulvia) to make a sizable donation to the

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Jewish Temple. However, the men “they employed [the money] for their own uses, and spent the money themselves” (*Antiquities*, 18.82). Tiberius (Fulvia’s husband) had 4,000 Jews expelled from Rome because of this. Josephus writes, “Thus were these Jews banished out of the city by the wickedness of four men” (*Antiquities*, 18.84). Josephus also writes, “Let no one blaspheme those gods which other cities esteem such; nor may anyone steal what belongs to strange temples; nor take away the gifts that are dedicated to any god” (*Antiquities*, 4.207). This implies that the Jewish people were doing this, or perhaps, were tempted to do this. This would make sense of Paul’s indictment that “The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you” (v.24).⁶”

Note: The evidenceunseen.com website does not have an “About” tab in the menu, it does have some information about the author, James Rochford, if you look hard enough.

“He [James Rochford] is an elder at Dwell Community Church, where he teaches classes in theology, apologetics, and weekly Bible studies. He graduated Magna Cum Laude from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School with his Masters in Theological Studies. In his free time, he enjoys writing, playing music, drawing, and leading a homechurch.”⁷”

Romans 2:23 You who boast in the Law, through your breaking the Law, do you dishonor God?

Romans 2:24 For “the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you,” just as it is written. (Isaiah 52:5)

Deuteronomy 4:6-8 → Isaiah 52:5 → Romans 2:23-24

6 <https://www.evidenceunseen.com/bible-difficulties-2/nt-difficulties/romans-2/rom-222-what-does-it-mean-to-rob-temples/>

7 <https://www.evidenceunseen.com/aboutjamesrochford/>

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Why did Paul pick these five questions? Why are they relevant in this argument? What makes them pertinent and applicable to his audience?

Perhaps we need to look at the Torah. These questions are arranged in a table with references to the commands that are broken as a result of these rhetorical questions.

Verse	Text	Torah Command
2:21	You who teach another, do you not teach yourself?	Deuteronomy 4:1
2:21	You who preach that one shall not steal, do you steal?	Exodus 20:14 Deuteronomy 5:19 8 th Commandment
2:22	You who say that one should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery?	Exodus 20:13 Deuteronomy 5:18 7 th Commandment
2:22	You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?	Exodus 20:3 Deuteronomy 5:8-10 2 nd Commandment
2:23	You who boast in the Law through your breaking the Law, do you dishonor God?	Deuteronomy 4:6 Isaiah 52:5

The result of not obeying the commands of God is the blasphemy of the name of God.

This is not unique to Jews.

Christians sin and cause Christianity to be criticized.

If there is time, let us read Deuteronomy chapter 4.