

Romans 2:21

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal?

Analysis

Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself?—οὐν διδάσκων ἔτερον σεαυτὸν οὐ διδάσκεις (ho oun didaskōn heteron seauton ou didaskeis). The particle οὖν (oun, "therefore") pivots from privilege (vv. 17-20) to hypocrisy. Paul fires five rhetorical questions (vv. 21-23) like arrows, each exposing contradiction between profession and practice. The verb διδάσκω (didaskō, "teach") appears twice, emphasizing the irony: teachers not teaching themselves.

Thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal?—κηρύσσων μὴ κλέπτειν κλέπτεις (ho kēryssōn mē kleptein klepteis). Κηρύσσω (kēryssō, "preach/proclaim") suggests public, authoritative proclamation of the eighth commandment. Κλέπτω (kleptō, "steal") could be literal theft or violating the spirit through exploitation, fraud, or cheating (Malachi 3:8-10 accuses Israel of robbing God). Jewish leaders enriched themselves through temple commerce (Matthew 21:12-13) and devouring widows' houses (Mark 12:40).

This verse devastates religious hypocrisy: proclaiming God's law while violating it. Jesus condemned identical duplicity in Matthew 23:3: "they say, and do not." James 3:1 warns that teachers face stricter judgment precisely because they instruct others. The question format convicts rather than merely stating accusation—Paul forces his audience to render self-verdict. The pattern anticipates modern therapeutic insight: we condemn in others what we secretly practice ourselves.

Historical Context

First-century Jewish teachers held positions of authority and respect. However, some exploited their status for financial gain. Temple corruption was rampant—money changers and sellers in the Court of Gentiles, priestly families controlling lucrative sacrificial market. Jesus's temple cleansing (John 2:13-17) directly addressed this. Additionally, some teachers imposed heavy financial burdens on followers while living luxuriously. Paul here confronts systemic hypocrisy where Torah knowledge created pride and opportunity for exploitation rather than holiness.

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. What biblical truth do I teach or proclaim to others while violating it in my private life?
2. In what ways might I be 'stealing'—dishonesty in business, cheating on taxes, exploiting others, robbing God of tithes or time?
3. How does awareness that teachers face stricter judgment (James 3:1) affect my willingness to instruct others?

Interlinear Text

ό	οὖν	διδάσκεις	ἄτερον	σεαυτὸν	οὐ	διδάσκεις
which	Thou therefore	teachest	another	thyself	not	teachest
G3588	G3767	G1321	G2087	G4572	G3756	G1321
ό	κηρύσσων	μὴ	κλέπτεις	κλέπτεις		
which	thou that preachest	not	a man should	a man should		
G3588	G2784	G3361	G2813	G2813		

Additional Cross-References

1 Corinthians 9:27 (Parallel theme): But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.

Luke 12:47 (Parallel theme): And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes.

Micah 3:11 (Parallel theme): The heads thereof judge for reward, and the priests thereof teach for hire, and the prophets thereof divine for money: yet will they lean upon the LORD, and say, Is not the LORD among us? none evil can come upon us.

Luke 11:46 (Parallel theme): And he said, Woe unto you also, ye lawyers! for ye lade men with burdens grievous to be borne, and ye yourselves touch not the burdens with one of your fingers.

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