

On Sin

The real sin of human beings is that they take their wills, their lives, into their own hands, seek to secure themselves, and thus are self-confident, "boasting." Thus the primal sin of the heathen was that they did not understand their creatureliness and did not honor God (Rom 1:20 f.). The offense of the Gnostics is that they set up their own wisdom and despise the foolishness of preaching the cross that is the wisdom of God (1 Cor 1:18-31). The sin of the Jews is that they want to set up their "own righteousness" (Rom 10:3 f.; Phil 3:9) and "boast" before God (Rom 2:23 f.; 3:27; 4:2).

But what is the real sin of the Jews? Wherein lies the perversity of the way of the law? The first question Paul asks after he sets forth for the first time the doctrine of the righteousness of God based on "faith apart from the law" (Rom 3:21-26) is: "Then what has become of boasting?" (vs. 27). "Boasting," or "putting confidence in the flesh" (Phil 3:3 f.) characterizes the Jews' attitude under the law precisely because they make the law that demands obedience into a means of "boasting."

Sin is not primarily, but only secondarily, immorality. It is immorality as a consequence of the primal sin, that women and men do not honor God (Rom 1:21). The law that demands obedience is misused by the Jews as the means of self-glorification and boasting. They turn obedience into accomplishment and imagine that they themselves can secure their existence before God, that they are able to establish their righteousness by their own accomplishment.

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