

**The Book of Romans
Practicing or Preaching**

Romans 2:17-24

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Today we come to a new section of Paul's letter to the Romans, a new section of chapter 2, a new lesson that's important for us to learn here. As we begin a new section, let me just back up for a moment and remind you, sort of, from the beginning of the book, the flow of Paul's thought. It's my hope that by the time we're done with this section of Romans you would be able to stand up here and, sort of, recount the flow of the argument of Paul because that's how you ought to be able to discern this book, to be able to understand its contents.

You remember that chapter 1, the first 17 verses really are Paul's introduction to the letter. He introduces himself. He introduces us to those to whom he writes, the churches in Rome. He introduces some of the major themes that he'll deal with. In fact, at the end of his introduction, in verses 16 and 17 of chapter 1, he introduces the theme of this letter, which is the gospel of God. He mentioned it back in verse 1, but he really expands on it in verses 16 and 17. At the heart of his gospel is the message of justification by faith alone.

Now, after this brief introduction Paul sets out to show his readers that every single human being on the planet needs the gospel. And so to make that point he launches into two sweeping indictments of all humanity. The first indictment comes in chapter 1, beginning in verse 18 and running through the end of chapter 1 verse 32. It's an indictment of pagan humanity. This is an indictment of all those people who don't worship the true Creator God, who don't have the Scripture, who don't believe in the God of the Bible. And Paul's conclusion is, that they know enough about God their Creator, that's written in the creation itself, and they suppress that knowledge, that they are without excuse. And so all Pagans are guilty before God.

That brings us to the second sweeping indictment that begins in chapter 2 verse 1 and runs all the way to chapter 3 verse 8. This is an indictment of the other half of humanity and that is the Jews, or all of those who claim a connection to the true Creator God, the God of the Bible. They are not lost in idolatry but rather they are lost in self-righteousness and they too need the gospel. Paul intends, in these chapters, to prove that every person is a sinner. By the way, this is part of the gospel. Don't think that we're waiting to get to the gospel. This is part of the gospel message. Paul is showing the need for the gospel, which is truly part of the message of the gospel itself.

Now, in chapter 2 Paul points out that the Jews and all moral religious people need the gospel and they need it for three reasons. Last week we finished studying the first reason they need the

gospel, in the first 16 verses of chapter 2, and it's this, knowing what is sinful and condemning it in others will not allow you to escape God's wrath. It's fine if you see sin in the lives of the people around you, if you look at pagans who don't worship the Creator, and you say, how could they do those things, and you condemn those things, don't think that that's going to get you off at the judgment. Paul says it's not going to work that way. God is a god of justice and that justice will be done at the judgment.

Now, today we examine the second reason that the Jews and all religious moral people need the gospel and this is the second reason, having and knowing the Scripture will not allow you to escape God's wrath. Having and knowing the Scripture will not allow you to escape God's coming wrath. This is the message of verses 17 to 24. Let me read it for us. Romans 2:17,

But if you bear the name Jew and rely upon the Law and boast in God, and know His will and approve the things that are essential, being instructed out of the Law, and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of the immature, having in the Law the embodiment of knowledge and of the truth, you, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that one shall not steal, do you steal? You who say that one should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who boast in the Law, through your breaking the Law, do you dishonor God? For "THE NAME OF GOD IS BLASPHEMED AMONG THE GENTILES BECAUSE OF YOU," just as it is written.

Now, this morning I'm going to do something that I have never done in our study of the book of Romans; I'm going to cover eight verses in a single message. Don't get used to it. It's not going to happen again. But I want to do it here because Paul's argument in the verses I just read for you are not nearly as tight and condensed as what we have seen so far in the book of Romans, and I want you to get the flow of the one main point he's making. So let it, sort of, unfold as we work our way through these verses so that you get a sense of what it would have been like to have been a Jewish person sitting in a synagogue listening to the Apostle Paul, sort of, roll out your need for the gospel.

Now Paul's intention in this paragraph is to show that the Jews, in spite of the fact that they possessed God's written revelation, are just as liable to His judgment as the Gentiles are. The theme of these verses is pretty straightforward. Having the Scripture, knowing the Scripture, even teaching the Scripture to others, without obeying it dishonors God and actually increases a person's condemnation and guilt before God.

Now, the paragraph breaks down pretty simply. In verses 17 to 20 Paul identifies the, sort of, "if," it's the "if" part of the statement. He identifies here the privileges that the Jews enjoyed related to the Scripture. And he doesn't mean "if" in the sense of this may or may not be true, he

means that, since this is true, might be a better way to translate it, and he concentrates on the privileges that they have related to the Scripture.

In verses 21 to 24 he gives us what amounts to the “then.” He doesn’t keep that formal, sort of, grammatical structure, but he identifies their complete failure to live in obedience to the Scripture they possessed. The emphasis in these verses is on, contrary to what we saw in the previous verses, it’s on the written Law of God. Let me show you how this is the emphasis here, on the Scripture. Notice, in these verses he makes a big point of saying that the Jews have the written revelation. It’s been revealed to them. Look at verse 20, “having in the Law the embodiment of knowledge and of the truth.” They have the written revelation of God.

In fact, he comes back to this in chapter 3 verse 1, “what advantage has the Jew?” Verse 2, he has huge advantages. First of all, “that they were entrusted with the oracles of God.” Imagine the advantage to be the people on earth given God’s written revelation. They have the Law. And go back to chapter 2. Notice in verse 17, having this Law, they “rely on the Law,” and verse 23, they even “boast in this Law.”

But in addition to having it, they also know it. They don’t just possess it, they are students of it; they know the Law. Look at verse 18, “being instructed out of the Law.” They had and knew the Law of God, the Scripture, but it didn’t produce change in them. You see, for unbelievers, having and knowing God’s Word doesn’t produce change, it produces instead, hypocrisy. In other words, they just accumulate knowledge without obedience.

It also produces false confidence. This is frightening, but they think, because they have the Bible, because they have the Scripture, that means they have a relationship with God when, in fact, none exists at all. False confidence. Now, let’s look at this and see how Paul unfolds it. I want to notice, first of all, in verses 17 to 20, this false confidence they had in Scripture, a false confidence in Scripture.

Paul begins with a list of privileges in which the Jews took pride, privileges that they thought made them superior to the Gentiles. It was a false confidence based in the Scripture and it took several forms. First of all, they had a false confidence in having God’s Word, in possessing God’s Word. Notice verse 17. He’s going to build to the center here, which I’ve already shown you is really the emphasis, having the Law, but he begins in verse 17, “But if you bear the name Jew.”

Now just to remind you, Paul is in the flow of an argument that he began back in chapter 2 verse 1 and he’s using a method for his argument that’s called the diatribe. Essentially, he creates an imaginary fictitious person that he’s arguing with, he’s presenting his argument to. All of the language throughout this chapter is addressed to a single person, but it’s an imaginary person, a Jewish person representing all of the Jews as he speaks against them. But in verse 17, for the first time, Paul finally identifies this fictitious imaginary person that he’s been addressing

throughout the chapter already, and it's a Jewish person. Notice, verse 17 says, "if you bear the name Jew."

Now, this label Jew was first used in the time of the exile, the Babylonian exile. In fact, the first time it occurs in Scripture is in 2 Kings 16:6. In our English Bibles it's translated as Judean because originally the word meant, "one who lives in the geographical region that was given to the tribe of Judah." You know, the area around Jerusalem. That large land mass that was given to the tribe of Judah. That's what it originally meant, someone who is Judean. After the exile when the few people, few Jews came back from Babylon and repatriated in the land, most of them settled in that area.

So, over time all Israelites came to be known as Judean or as Jews, and by the New Testament era the label Jew had come to describe anyone who was a physical descendant of Abraham. Do you call yourself a physical descendant of Abraham? To call oneself a Jew then was a claim to belong to God's chosen people, to be a part of the covenant that He made with Abraham.

Verse 17 goes on to say, and this is really the main issue, because you belong to God's chosen people, you have a special privilege; you have the Law, and you "rely upon the Law." They had confidence in God's Law. The Greek word translated rely is used only one other time in the New Testament. It means "to rest upon, to put one's hope in." But this wasn't a legitimate confidence in God and His truth. Instead, this was a confidence that was misplaced; because God had given His Law to them they were okay, they were privileged, they were God's favorites, because He had given His law to them.

Jesus addressed this very misperception during His earthly ministry. In John 5:45 He says to the Jews, "Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; the one who accuses you is Moses." Now, listen to how He finishes, "in whom you have set your hope." You see, instead of the Law doing what it's supposed to do, what it does to most of us, which is accuse us and make us run to the gospel, instead they didn't see the Law as accusing them at all. They put their hope in the Law. They put their confidence in the Law; it was a misplaced confidence.

The same Greek word rely is used, by the way, in the Septuagint with this same idea of a misplaced confidence. In Micah 3:11, Micah, talking to Judah (God talking to Judah through Micah), says, "Her leaders pronounce judgment for a bribe, her priests instruct for a price and her prophets divine for money." All the leaders of Israel were in it for money. "Yet they lean," there's our word, they rely, they put their hope, "on the LORD saying, 'Is not the Lord in our midst? Calamity will not come upon us.'" It was a misplaced, false confidence, and that's exactly what they did with the Scripture.

By the way, we'll see when we get to chapter 9 they even misunderstood the whole purpose behind the Scripture. They thought the Scripture existed to mark out a path to a right standing

before God based on their own works, their own efforts, but in reality it was to mark out a path to faith in their Messiah.

Now look again at verse 17. Not only do you call yourself a Jew and rely upon this Law, but because you have the Law you “boast in God.” Now, there’s a sense in which they were supposed to boast in God, right? I mean Jeremiah 9:23-24 says, “Thus says the Lord, ‘Let not a wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me.’” God said, if you’re going to boast, boast in the fact that you understand and know Me.

That describes a legitimate pride in God, in who He is and in what He has done. But that’s not the sense Paul means. Instead, he means that they boasted that the true God had made Himself known to them and not to others. It’s really boasting in their own self-importance. It was boasting in a monopoly on God. They thought that because they belonged to God’s chosen people they therefore possessed His Law and because they possessed His Law they enjoyed a special relationship to Him. It was a false confidence.

Now, there’s a second way this false confidence manifests itself, not only in having or possessing God’s Law, but secondly, a false confidence in knowing God’s Word. Notice verse 18, he goes on to describe their privileges, “and you know His will.” The Jews, through Scripture, knew what God required of them. They knew what He commanded and what He forbids. They knew what He punishes and what He rewards. And this was far more than the pagans knew from what they saw in creation and from the work of the Law written on the heart. It was a huge advantage to have God’s written revelation.

In fact, the Psalmist, in Psalm 147:19-20 writes this, “God declares His words to Jacob, His statutes and His ordinances to Israel. He has not dealt thus with any other nation; and as for His ordinances, they have not known them. Praise Yahweh!” It was an amazing special privilege to be the nation who received the written revelation of God. They knew the will of God. Verse 18 goes on to say, “and they approve the things that are essential.” They were able to identify and to approve those things that really mattered to God. They knew the light things, they knew the heavy things. They knew what really mattered, what was essential, and what wasn’t.

How did they know that? Well, notice Paul explains in the end of verse 18 and this is absolutely key, they knew it because they were people “being instructed out of the Law.” The word instructed is the word from which we get our word catechized. They were catechized, they were orally instructed in God’s or out of God’s Law. They were taught God’s Law, in their homes, in their synagogues; their parents and their priests and their Levites instructed them in God’s Word. You remember what Paul said to Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:15, he says, “from childhood you have known the sacred writings.” They were taught; they knew the Scripture.

Do you see the point Paul is making? Having the Scripture and even knowing the Scripture is not evidence of a genuine relationship to God. The Bible's filled with examples of this. Let me just give you a few from the New Testament. Take Nicodemus, for example. Nicodemus, what does Jesus say about Nicodemus in John 3? He says he is "the teacher in Israel." Nicodemus was the primary, chief, most exalted rabbi in the entire land of Israel. He had studied the Bible his entire life. He knew the Hebrew Scriptures forward and backward, but he didn't know that there was regeneration. He didn't know he needed to be regenerated.

The Pharisees are another example. Jesus said of them, "You search the Scriptures." They knew the Scriptures. "You search the Scriptures because in them you think you have eternal life." But they missed the big point because He says, "the scriptures are they which testify of Me." They knew the Scriptures but they didn't know the God of Scripture.

The rich young ruler is another example. Luke 18 tells us he was a ruler in the local synagogue. Here's a man who at a very young age, because of his zeal for the Scripture, because of his knowledge of the Scripture, had been put in a position of leadership over the local synagogue. In his interchange with Jesus it's very clear that he knew the Scripture and yet what does Jesus say about him? He's not in the kingdom and, in fact, it's hard for a man as wealthy as he is to enter into the kingdom. So, he wasn't a true believer even though he knew the Scripture.

I'll tell you, another example that's a very sobering example, is Judas Iscariot. Think about this. Think about the Bible teaching Judas Iscariot had. You have the unfortunate opportunity, assignment to listen to me every week. But imagine what it would be like to sit under the ministry of our Lord, to hear His teaching ministry, not just once or twice, but constantly, day and night for several years. What he must have known about the Scripture, what he must have learned from our Lord, and yet what did Jesus say of him? He is the "son of perdition." He's the son of destruction. He knew the Bible but he didn't know the Lord.

You run to Paul's ministry and you see it with Demas in 2 Timothy 4:10, "Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica." Again, think about what it would be like to be Demas. Think of all the sermons he heard the Apostle Paul preach. Think about the theological discussions that he had with Paul over the dinner table. He knew the Bible, he knew the Scripture, and yet he eventually deserted, showing that he had never been a genuine Christian at all.

You know, in my own experience I've seen this often. In fact, in my own personal life I saw it. Before I came to faith at the age of 17 I was curious about the Scripture. I read the Scripture. I studied the Scripture. Mine was the first hand up in youth group to answer the questions. I memorized passages. I memorized large sections. I memorized books. I taught the Bible to others. All before I came to faith in Christ.

There was an event several years after my conversion that further cemented this into my mind. I was going every Saturday night as a college student and seminary student, I went to the prisons and preached every Saturday night, and I met a man there by the name of T.J. I can still see his face. T.J. was, at that time in my life, the man that I had met who was the most knowledgeable in Scripture. I didn't know anyone else personally, I hadn't interacted on a personal level with anyone, who knew the scripture better than T.J. He was in the prison for murder and he was completely unrepentant. That made a huge impact on me at a young age, to say there can be a serious disconnect between one's knowledge of Scripture and one's genuine relationship and devotion to Jesus Christ.

I've seen it played out in the life of the church. There have been young people who've grown up in Christian homes, who've gone through the children's program and the youth program of a good church like this one, and they've learned countless verses in Awana, committed even entire books of the Bible to memory, but over time as they have a chance to express themselves in their own hearts it becomes clear through their choices and desires that they have never been truly Christians at all. They don't love Jesus Christ. They don't want to give their life in service to Him. They don't want to obey Him. So again and again we see that knowing the Scripture can give you a false confidence.

There's another manifestation of this false confidence, not only in having the Scripture and in knowing the Scripture, but there's a false confidence in teaching God's Word. We see this in verses 19 to 20. Now, before we look at the verses, let me just remind you that Israel was assigned this responsibility. She was to be a light to the nations, a teacher of the nations. Leon Morris puts it this way, "To this nation was given the revelation that was to teach all mankind about God. That revelation was never meant to be a private treasure of one nation, which it could withhold from all others. Israel was to bring the light of God into the world's darkness; it was to share its revelation with the multitudes that did not have it." Now, they were well qualified to do this. They had the Scripture. They knew the Scripture. They were uniquely qualified to teach others about the true God through the Scripture. Except for one thing. They themselves often didn't know the God of Scripture.

Sadly, in spite of that, in spite of their own disobedience to the Word, they thought they were still qualified to teach the Gentiles. Look at verse 19. He's talking to unbelieving Jewish people and he says, "You are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind." You are fully persuaded, you're convinced that you can guide the morally and spiritually blind to God. Ironically, you remember what Jesus said the Pharisees. He called them "blind guides leading the spiritually blind."

Verse 19, he says, "you are a light to those who are in darkness." This is probably a reference to conversion from idolatry to Judaism. The conversion from pagan idolatry to Judaism was often described as moving from darkness to light. Just as in the New Testament era, moving from

paganism to true faith in Jesus Christ, in God through Jesus Christ, is described as changing from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light. Same thing. So Paul's probably saying here in verse 19, you believe, by teaching them the scripture, you can make them proselytes; you can attach them to the true God.

Verse 20, "you are a corrector of the foolish." The word corrector is probably better-translated educator. "Corrector" in the sense of teacher, instructor, "of the foolish," that is, those who lack any perception of moral and spiritual reality. You are "a teacher of the immature." The word translated immature is actually, literally, babes, babies, infants. You are a teacher of babies. The point here is that those who, like children, have no knowledge of the true God and who need elementary instruction in spiritual things, you can teach them; that's what you believe.

Verse 20, and this is key, "having in the Law the embodiment of knowledge and of the truth." The reason the Jews believed they were qualified, and were qualified by God to teach others, is that the Law they had received from God was "the embodiment of knowledge and the truth." The word embodiment is the word *morphe*. The Scripture is like the perfect external representation of the internal reality of God's truth. One author says, "The Jew saw himself not as having produced yet another form of knowledge and truth which might compete with the various philosophies of the day." In other words, the Jews didn't say, okay, here's our version of truth to put on the bookshelf next to the other versions of truth. No. "He saw himself as standing before the world holding in the book of the Law that truth which is God's truth, the knowledge which God Himself has made known. His place was thus supreme and," the author says, "Paul is not disagreeing."

This is really important for you to understand. All the privileges described in verses 17 to 20 are exactly the privileges that first century Jews claimed for themselves, even in the same language Paul uses. You can find in Jewish writings where they described themselves this way. And they are the privileges God had actually given them. You see, the problem wasn't that the claims in verses 17 to 20 were illegitimate. Those claims were true. Here's the problem. Listen carefully. This is the crux. The problem is that they failed to practice what they preached. They failed to obey the Word that they took such pride in.

And so, having pointed out their false confidence in the Scripture, Paul brings to them a confrontation with the Scripture. He uses the Scripture on which they rely to confront them. Now, his main point in this next section is in the first part of verse 21. Here's the point he makes, "you, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself?" I like J.B. Phillips's paraphrase, I don't always, but I think he captures the idea here. He says, "Prepared as you are to instruct others, do you ever teach yourself anything?" Do you ever teach yourself anything? Paul's answer is, no, you don't.

Look down in verse 23, "you break the Law." By their own conduct, by their own disobedience, the Jews denied the very Word they relied on and they boasted in. Now, that's the main point,

but then Paul gives three specific examples of how that disobedience manifests itself and the three examples he uses all come from the most basic summary of God's will, the Ten Commandments. The first two examples are from what we call the second table of the Law, the final six commands having to do with our duty to man. The third example comes from the first table of the Law, the first four commands that deal with our duty to God.

Now, look at these examples. Example one, verse 21, "You who preach that one shall not steal, do you steal?" Paul takes this example, of course, from the eighth commandment, "You shall not steal." He's saying this, you who preach so loudly to your own children, in Israel, to the Gentiles, don't steal, God doesn't want us to steal, are you really equally honest in your own dealings? And Paul expects them, if they're honest with themselves, to respond how? No, not really.

Look at example number two, verse 22, "You who say that one should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery?" This example, of course, is from the seventh commandment. Now, although the Jews were more careful than the Gentiles regarding sexual sin, it was still very commonly practiced among them. In fact, one Jewish writer, writing around the time of the first century, indicts his fellow Jews this way, "His eyes are upon every woman immodestly. All of them committed adultery with their neighbours' wives, and they left no sins which they did not commit, and even worse than the Gentiles." That's a Jewish man talking about the problem in Jewish culture.

Example number three, verse 22 goes on to say, "You who abhor," who detest, "idolatry," and, of course, by this time, after the Babylonian exile, Israel was done with their idolatry. From that point on they took pride in their monotheism. So, "you abhor idols, but do you rob temples?" Now, this example comes from combining the first commandment and the second commandment, "You shall have no other gods before me," and "You shall not make unto yourself any graven image." What's Paul talking about, "do you rob temples?" Well, it was actually a common practice. Both the Jewish Mishnah and the Jewish Talmud speak of this practice. In fact, they give an example of an Israelite who takes an idol from a pagan temple and sells it to a Gentile.

Now, you can just see how he excuses himself. It's like, you know, they shouldn't be worshipping idols. It's really wrong of them to worship idols. So I need to take that idol so they won't worship. Well, you know, it won't be a problem if, in the exchange, I, one of God's chosen people, profits from this little enterprise, and so I'll sell it. And he sells it to a Gentile and the Gentile ends up worshipping the idol. Now, this is strictly forbidden. God forbids His people from owning or profiting by anything related to idolatry. Listen to Deuteronomy 7:25, "The graven images of their gods you are to burn with fire; you shall not covet the silver or the gold that is on them, nor take it for yourselves." But that's exactly what was happening.

It became so common that the only other place in the New Testament where a word like this occurs, this robbing temples, is in Acts 19:37. It's when, in Ephesus, the town clerk has to defend Paul and his companions from, guess what? Robbing pagan temples. He says, they didn't. Why does he say that? Because this was a very common practice among the Jews. Think about this, although they didn't engage in idolatry, they were more than happy to benefit from others' idolatry. Displaying what? A different kind of idolatry in their heart, covetousness.

Now, look at those three examples. Were those three commands commonly broken by the Jews of the first century? Absolutely, yes. In fact, a rabbi, Rabbi Johanan ben Zakai, preached a message about the Jews about ten years after Paul wrote this letter in which he bemoans, "the increase of murder, adultery, sexual vice, commercial and judicial corruption, bitter sectarian strife, and other evils."

But I don't think Paul means here just the outward expression of these sins, because remember the context, Paul is giving his typical argument that he would give with Jews, in a synagogue, to convince them they need the gospel. Now, for this argument to be effective it means that it needed to apply to most every person who was there. So Paul is not just talking here about these external acts, but about the spirit of these commands. He wanted them to go deeper in their thinking, because not every Jewish person sitting in the synagogue had actually broken into someone else's home and stolen something, nor had each of them physically committed adultery, just as Paul had not. You remember what he said about himself in Philippians 3:6? He says, "as to the righteousness which is in the Law, I was found," externally, "blameless." So Paul is emphasizing the internal nature of the Law.

I wish we had time to go to Romans 7. When we get to Romans 7, the first part of Romans 7, Paul is talking about his life before Christ and Paul, before Christ, learned this lesson from the tenth commandment. He learned that the Law was internal. When he came to commandment number ten, "You shall not covet," he realized, wait a minute, that's something that happens inside. Well, if that's a command about what happens inside, maybe the other commands had to do with what happens inside as well. And he says in the first part of Romans 7, this came crushing down upon me with guilt. I think it's what prepared his heart for the Damascus road. It was this growing awareness that he, in fact, had not kept God's Law because it wasn't just external; it was internal as well.

Jesus made this same point in His ministry, especially in the Sermon on the Mount, you remember, where He talks about the reality that anger is the soul's parallel to murder, lust is the soul's parallel to adultery. This idea wasn't new with Jesus. It's embedded in the Law. It's embedded in the tenth commandment. Listen to Exodus 20:17, "You shall not covet your neighbor's house." What is that? That's the soul precursor to stealing. "You shall not covet your neighbor's wife." What's that? That's the soul's precursor to adultery. So, embedded in the Law was this reality that it's both the external and the internal.

So these three sins here, both in acts and in thoughts, are simply illustrations to confront the Jewish people with the gulf between their claims and their conduct. These are horrible sins, to steal, to commit adultery, to engage in idolatry. Those are horrible sins. So are the soul versions, to covet, to lust, to love money so much that you're willing to profit off of other people's idolatry. Those are horrible sins. But here's Paul's point. Listen carefully. This is where he's driving. To set yourself up as a teacher and to teach against these things and then to commit them is to profoundly increase your own guilt before God. Why? Because you can never say to God, I didn't know. Why? Because you just taught everybody else. You just told everybody else, don't do this.

Now, notice the tragic consequences in verses 23 and 24. Breaking God's Word always dishonors God. In verse 23 Paul asks a rhetorical question that expects a yes answer. "You who boast in the Law, through your breaking the Law, do you dishonor God?" Absolutely, you do. They boasted in God's Law, but their professed love for and allegiance to Scripture was completely undermined by their failure to obey it.

You see, when we take pride in the fact that we have the Scripture but then we live in disobedience to the Scripture, are you ready for this, if you have the Scripture, if you understand the Scripture, but you don't make a concerted effort to obey what God says in the Scripture, it dishonors God. That's what Paul says. It dishonors God. And specifically, it causes God's enemies to blaspheme.

Look at verse 24, "For 'THE NAME OF GOD IS BLASPHEMED AMONG THE GENTILES BECAUSE OF YOU,' just as it is written." Paul here quotes from the Old Testament, either Isaiah 52:5 or possibly Ezekiel 36:20. Doesn't matter, because the point of both passages is the same. The prophets are talking about the Babylonian captivity and he says, Israel sinned, which forced God to send them into captivity. But what did their captors conclude? The fact that we captured them means our God is stronger than their God and they blasphemed the true God. It was the sin of God's people that led to that reality. Having the Scripture, knowing the Scripture, teaching the Scripture is a place of false confidence if there isn't a heart of obedience to the Scripture.

Now, what are the implications of this passage for us? Very quickly, there are three of them. Number one, for genuine Christians this is a warning about the insidious sin of hypocrisy. That's really what's going on here. They were being hypocritical. They knew the Word and talked about the Word and gloried in the Word but didn't do the Word. It's a warning against hypocrisy. Or, there are other forms of hypocrisy, like saying you love God, but as Jesus puts it, your heart being far from Him. Or, putting on a façade. Coming to church with this wonderful façade, I'm this wonderful Christian person, I love God, I love God's Word, I love the church, and then going home and engaging intentionally in unrepentant patterns of sin. Beware of hypocrisy. In fact, in Luke 12:1, "Jesus began saying to His disciples first of all, 'Beware of the

leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.” Hypocrisy is like yeast in bread, it permeates everything. You can’t get rid of it, destroys.

Number two, implication number two, for professing disobedient Christians. If you say, you know, I’m a Christian, but you’re living in a pattern of disobedience, this is a call for self-examination. Listen, if you don’t seek genuinely to obey the Scripture, the Scripture that you read, the Scripture that you hear taught here week after week, if week after week you open your Bible and read, week after week you take your notes, slide them in the cover, forget about them, and you live however you want, you better examine yourself. You may not be a Christian at all. Your reading, your study, your teaching, does not mean that you are a genuine follower of Jesus Christ. The question is, is your life marked by a pattern of obedience to Christ? Luke 6:46, Jesus says, “Why do you call Me, “Lord, Lord” and do not do what I say?” It doesn’t make any sense. Don’t call me Lord and then blow off everything I say.

Turn to John 14. John 14:15, “If you love Me,” notice what Jesus doesn’t say, “you should keep My commandments.” He says, “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.” Verse 23, “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word.” Verse 24, “He who does not love Me does not keep My words.” It couldn’t be any clearer than that. Your obedience, your desire to obey Christ and your genuine efforts to do so, they don’t save you, that’s impossible, you’re saved by Christ, but your obedience demonstrates that you have been spiritually rescued, that you have been changed. You better examine yourself if you’re always taking in the Word and never really taking seriously the response to the Word. You’re probably not in Christ.

Number three, for the moral and religious this passage is a call to believe the gospel. This is Paul’s main point in the context. Listen, if you’re trusting in your own goodness, your own obedience to God, your own merit, your own efforts, this passage should remind you that your knowing God’s Word, your even teaching God’s Word, doesn’t make you impress God more, it adds to your guilt because you’re not practicing it. Your only hope and my only hope is to run from our own merit and our own efforts to the work, the life and death of Jesus Christ as our hope of forgiveness, as our hope of being right with God.

Listen, your misplaced confidence in your knowledge of Scripture will not protect you at the judgment. God’s not going to say, oh, you memorized the Book of James; wonderful, come on in. It will make your guilt far worse. The only hope we have is to run from our disobedience, from our own unworthiness, to Jesus Christ, to repent and believe in Him. Let’s pray together.

Father, thank You for Your Word, for how it pierces our souls. Thank You for the reality we’ve learned this morning. Father, for those of us in Christ, help us to beware of the danger of hypocrisy. Help us to live *Coram Deo*, before Your face, not for others, but for You.

Father, I pray that, for those who profess Christ, but who are engaging in an ongoing, unrepentant lifestyle and pattern of sin, Father help them to examine themselves. Help them to

seriously consider whether or not they're truly in the faith. Don't let them be self-deceived and show up at the judgment and hear You say, "I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WORKER OF LAWLESSNESS."

Father, I pray for those who are trusting in their own goodness, their own morality, their own knowledge of Your Word. Lord, like the Jews that Paul indicted here, let them see they have no hope, that that really just increases their guilt when they stand before You, that the only hope is found in the good news that originates with You about Your Son and that we can be reconciled to You through His life and death. Father, may they repent and believe today. We pray in Jesus's name, amen.