

ROMANS

GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS REVEALED

IT COULD NEVER HAPPEN TO ME

Text: Romans 2:17-24

Main preaching point: Religious privileges grant no exemption from the judgment of God.

INTRODUCTION:

I want to begin this message by asking you a very personal question—*Are you a religious person?* Now I know that the moment I use the word “religion,” most people in Bible-believing churches like ours will say, “Pastor, you’re not speaking to me because I’m not a religious person; I have a relationship with God.”

However, let me define our terms. Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones once said that “defining terms is so important so that we are sure and certain about exactly what we mean.” When I use the term “**religious,**” I am using it in the way James the Apostle used the term in the first chapter and the 27th verse of his epistle.

- **James 1:27**—Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, *and* to keep oneself unstained by the world.

In other words, a truly religious person in God’s sight—or one who practices God-pleasing religion in biblical terms—*is not one who merely goes to church and goes through the routine of worship in some sort of ritualistic way.* But one who practices God-pleasing religion is *one who sincerely believes and who is actively seeking to live out their faith in the world and help others.* That’s God-pleasing religion. Does that describe you?

It was the renowned pastor and teacher, Philipp Doddridge who defined true religion in this way: “*True religion is a sense of God in the soul.*” Does that describe you? Do you sense God in your mind and heart, moving your will to obedience? He went on to say,

“...and one who engages himself with great care to conduct his life in a manner of which he has reason to believe it will be pleasing to God.”

Jonathan Edwards, William Law, John Wesley, and many of the old school preachers and teachers would speak of people who sincerely believe and are actively and daily seeking to live out their faith. If that describes you, then in the truest sense, you are a religious person.

As we come to the 17th verse of chapter 2 of Romans, it is to the religious person—represented by the Jew—that Paul turns. What Paul is aiming to do is press home upon the Jews in general, but every religious person in particular, *how futile it is to rely upon the Law or any privileges you may have in hopes of changing your standing before God.* Even more devastating than that, the Apostle Paul unveils in this text, the greatest danger the Jew or the religious person faces—and that is *the danger of hypocrisy*, the sin of pretense.

Hypocrisy is one of the most subtle sins that can afflict those who have special revelation like us. By special revelation, I mean *Bible knowledge*. And everyone listening today is under the rainfall of truth and the sunshine of God's special revelation. You have been exposed to the truth of God, and so all of us face this common temptation of pretense.

In fact, Jesus spoke much about this *sin of hypocrisy*, and He always spoke to religious people about it. Let's trace some of His words about hypocrisy before we unpack the text.

- **Matthew 23:13**—"But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut off the kingdom of heaven from people; for you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in.

When you think of scribes and Pharisees, don't automatically think of just the religious rulers of that day, but think of the person who had been exposed to special revelation or the knowledge of the Bible. They had knowledge of the truth, but their lives did not come in harmony with the truth, and they became a stumbling block to those needing to enter.

- **Matthew 23:28**—"So you, too, outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness."

Jesus spoke straight and strongly about the sin of hypocrisy. The mask it wears has this outward appearance, but inwardly something else is going on. Many of you are in peril of this sin at this very moment. Outwardly you seem to be *interested*, but inwardly you're saying, "I really don't want to hear this; I don't want to be here—I'm only here because I want people to think that I'm really serious about God." We can go further.

- **Matthew 6:2**—"So when you give to the poor, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.
- **Luke 6:42**—"Or how can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me take out the speck that is in your eye,' when you yourself do not see the log that is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take out the speck that is in your brother's eye."

The illustration that Jesus uses is almost comical if it wasn't so serious. The force of the question—"how can you say...when you yourself"—is our Lord's way of saying, what nerve? How insincere to deal with someone else without first dealing with yourself. This is the problem of the hypocrite. Paul brings the application to the church itself. Listen to his words to the church in Rome.

- **Romans 12:9**—*Let love be without hypocrisy.*

It was to people like us in church that Paul admonishes to "*let love be without hypocrisy*," meaning that we can come to church, into the family of God, and love one another in a hypocritical way by saying things like, "O, sister, I'm praying for you, I love you," but deep inside you don't really care at all. You're just saying that because you want them to think you do. Paul said, "*Let love be without hypocrisy.*" James addresses it as well.

- **James 3:17**—But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy.

We all need love and wisdom, but James says to pray that it would be *without hypocrisy*. This is the greatest temptation and danger religious people face: *this sin of hypocrisy*, which Paul addresses in this text. This passage is for all who have ever thought about judgment and said, "*It could never happen to me.*"

EXPOSITION:

The Jews of Paul's day simply could not believe God would treat them the same way as everybody else—they were the chosen ones, the covenant nation; they knew God's law and believed *"it could never happen to me."* There are such people today. Many have been baptized, hear God's Word regularly, and participate in the Lord's Supper and service activities—and they can believe that others are heading for judgment, but they say, *"It could never happen to me."* The frame in which Paul *expands, elaborates, and amplifies* this teaching about judgment is constructed around four headings: *four privileges (vv.17-18), four practices (vv.19-20), four charges (vv.21-22), and one judgment (vv.23-24).*

A. FOUR PRIVILEGES (vv.17-18)

¹⁷ But if you bear the name "Jew" and rely upon the Law and boast in God, ¹⁸ and know *His* will and approve the things that are essential, being instructed out of the Law,

The word **"but"** pivots from the Gentile previously mentioned without the law to the Jew who has the law. For Paul to say, **"if you bear the name 'Jew'"** (v.17a) is a bit of sarcasm, as if to say, "You're not a true Jew, you are a Jew in *name only*—by birth, heritage, upbringing, and culture only." But a true Jew would be one who is not only circumcised in the flesh but circumcised in the heart by the new birth. He will turn to this subject at the end of the chapter (vv.25-29). But here Paul is sharpening his sword in his tone. Then he lists the four privileges.

1. **"And rely upon the Law" (v.17b)**—This is the number one privilege and the highest for a reason. This is "special revelation." Keep in mind what we have learned previously. Everyone has *general revelation* given by God in *creation* and *conscience*, but general revelation cannot save you. It can restrain you from bowing down to an idol as God, but it does not save. The Law is a part of special revelation. And to **"rely"** upon it means *to trust in your head knowledge of the Law*.

What does Paul mean by **"the Law"** here? Well, if you scan verses 12-29, the Law is mentioned no less than 20 times. *The Law* is dominant in this cluster of verses. So, what is the Law? The Law is referring to *the Law given to Moses*, and it divided into three sections: *moral law, ceremonial law, and civil law*. Moral law is *how you are to live*. Ceremonial law is *how you are to worship*. Civil law is *how you are to function as a nation and society*. When Paul mentions it here, he is referring to the moral law and the embodiment of the Law is found in the Ten Commandments. And the Ten Commandments are still directional and in play in our lives today. To deny this would be antinomian or against the law—and as Christians, we do not deny the law, we seek to fulfill it (*Rom.13:10*).

Who would argue that God should be number one in your life? Who would argue that you shouldn't have graven images of God or take His name in vain, that you ought to honor your father and mother, that you shouldn't steal, that you ought to tell the truth, and that you shouldn't covet within your heart? Who here would argue that these Commandments do not influence our lives right now? They do. And the law is very important and is still a part of our lives today.

Now, a brief footnote: **What is the purpose of the Law of God?** There are five purposes.

- 1) *It reveals the holiness of God*. It reveals His character, attributes, righteousness (His right to direct our lives), love, and sovereignty. We learn much about the Author by looking at what He writes.

- 2) *It reveals the sinfulness of man.* We are measured by the Law, and we are found to have fallen short of the glory of God. Spurgeon uses the analogy that the Law is like ten plowshares that plow up the hardened soil of our hearts so that the seed of the Gospel may go down into our hearts. And when our hearts are hardened, the seed of the Gospel just bounces off. This is why in the evangelism of lost souls (even our kids), there is a place for the use of the law to bring about conviction of sin.
 - 3) *It is a tutor to lead us to Christ (Gal.3:24).* It takes us to the front door of the classroom, and it does not take us into the class, but it points us to the Teacher—the Lord Jesus Christ. And the Holy Spirit brings us into the classroom of Christ to be taught by the only One who kept the Law perfectly, and who can forgive us of our offenses against the Law.
 - 4) *It functions as a restraint of evil in society*—it is a limited restraint, but it does have some degree of restraint.
 - 5) *The moral law reveals the will of God*—so as Christians, it points us, like a compass, into the center of His will concerning how we should relate to God and others.
2. **“Boast in God” (v.17c)**—What does Paul mean here? The person with special revelation has confidence in the law of God that reveals the knowledge of God. Now this boasting is not necessarily wrong. In Jeremiah 9:23-24, we are told *“Let not the wise man boast of 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”* (Cf. 1 Cor.1:31).

In Galatians 6:14, Paul says, *“But may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”* In Romans 5:11, Paul says, *“And not only this, but we also exult [boast] in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.”* So why is boasting in God wrong? In this context, what Paul means is the Jew or the religious person boasts about this special privilege of having that knowledge as if he now has a monopoly on God. His boast is *in the knowledge*. He is proud of the fact that the one True God is his God, but he does not take into consideration *the character of the God the Bible reveals.*

3. **“Know His will” (v.18a)**—How does one know God’s will? The law. The Law reveals *the will of God*. Notice carefully that Paul says you *“know His will,”* not that you *claim* to know it. The Jew actually knew what God revealed in the Law. When God spoke in the Law, it was clear that it was God’s will. It is a very, very, very high privilege, and yet there was severe condemnation of those who knew God’s will but failed to act on it.
4. **“Approve the things that are essential, being instructed out of the Law” (v.18b)**—How do we know what is essential? By essential, Paul means what is basic, primary, or indispensable to pleasing God and being right with Him. How do we know what is essential? Because the Law has instructed us. If you know the Bible, you can make correct decisions on what pleases God and what doesn’t. We can choose what is best over what is good. Here we discover that Paul is not discarding the Law for New Testament believers. He has already argued that *everyone* has the *function or operation of the law internally*, but those who have it externally know what is essential.

The religious person not only *has the Law*, but *they also have mastered it*. They can quote it; they can cross reference it; and they can go down into the details of it.

The Jews had all the great doctors of the Law, all the great rabbis. They had Nicodemus. They had Gamaliel (Paul's mentor). Today, we have many of the works, writings, and sermons of some of the best scholars the world has ever known—the early church fathers, the Reformers, the Puritans, Edwards, Wesley, Packer, Sproul, MacArthur, Piper, etc. The Jews had all those who could talk about the Law—they were religious, but it was merely intellectual, academic, and just educational. Oh, how this describes what takes place in many Christian circles today. We can sit around and talk theology and nuances and discuss the Books of the Bible, and that's needed, but if it stops there, if that's as far as it goes, then we are the people to whom Paul is speaking.

What privileges these are! And if you have been exposed to the Bible, what great privilege you and I have also. The question is, what are we doing with it?

Paul advances his argument from *four privileges* to *four practices*. These Jews or the people who know the Bible are not *inactive*, but *they are active with the Law*. They are *ministering, teaching, and passing down* the Law or the Bible to their children and others.

B. FOUR PRACTICES (vv.19-20)

As we look at each of these practices, I want you to be on the lookout for *what these privileges did to them*; in other words, the special danger and position that it placed them in. These practices come in rapid-fire succession—short pity statements in order to state the obvious.

The first position knowing the Bible places the religious person in is having a false assurance (v.19a)—¹⁹ and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind,

The false assurance comes in because *you have the Law and you are using the Law to help others*, but it does not mean *you have taught yourself*. You can be very good at passing down the truth to others but be very weak in applying it to yourself. The “**blind**” here is a reference to the Gentiles, the pagans, or the people in our day who are completely ignorant of the Bible. They did not grow up in church, and they do not know the Scriptures. As Paul is speaking this, the nation of Israel was not exactly a missionary force to the world. They had become a spiritual cul-de-sac, a self-contained holy huddle. They were not seeking to go into the world and reach the nations. They were *self-content* in sitting on the law and keeping it to themselves. Again, this is a bit of dripping sarcasm to prod them into thinking about *what they should be doing, but they are not*.

We can be like this—we can be a holy huddle. We can be holding the truth and not teaching ourselves or taking it to others. Paul does not deny the privileges. He is not saying they are not real—but here is the problem: *they started relying upon them*. That's our danger too. *We start trusting in the privileges and depending upon them, and then misusing them to our ruin*. Instead of those privileges leading us to the knowledge of Christ and transforming us so that the power of our witness is greater, we take those privileges for granted, sit on them, and test them to the destruction of our souls. Has the knowledge of the Bible given you a false assurance?

The second position knowing the Bible places the religious person in is recognizing a failed mission (v.19b)—a light to those who are in darkness,

The “**darkness**” here does not refer to physical darkness but spiritual darkness. It speaks to those who are without the knowledge of the Law. In Isaiah 42:6, it says that *Israel was appointed to be a light to the nations*.

And Christ Himself became the ultimate fulfillment of Isaiah 42, and that's why when He arrives in John 8:12, He said, "*I am the Light of the world.*" Then, Jesus sent the disciples to preach the Gospel to all the nations (*Matt.28:18-20*). So, where Israel failed, Christ commissioned the church. But this global mission was expected of the Jew. Jonah was a poster prophet of this failed mission. He so despised the vile immorality and savagery of the Ninevites that, rather than go where God sent him, he ran in the exact opposite direction. This is really an indictment upon them, and *it is an indictment upon us*—we who have the special revelation of God and been given a divine mission, but refuse to take the light of the Gospel to those in darkness.

Each and every Christian has been called to be a light and share the Gospel of light with a dark world. We may not be able to witness to everyone we see, but when is the last time you shared the Gospel with anyone? Did not Christ call us to go into the world and make disciples? Are we not called ambassadors of Christ? Has the Lord not given to us the ministry of reconciliation? The question again arises, what are we doing with it? We know it, but are we practicing it?

First, Paul shows the religious person the danger of entertaining *a false assurance by relying on the knowledge of the Bible alone*. Second, he explains how we are supposed to *be a light to those in darkness, but are we failing in our mission by not taking the Gospel to them?*

The third position knowing the Bible places the religious person in is inflated with a sense of our own superiority (v.20a)—²⁰ a corrector of the foolish,

The "**foolish**" refers to those who have worldly wisdom according to 1 Corinthians 1. The foolish in that day were those who sat at the feet of Greek philosophers and believed that wisdom was found in the intellectual minds of the scholars. They needed to be corrected. Solomon wrote, "*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom*" (*Prov.9:10*). We know the origin of the universe and man. We know why there is a problem of evil. We understand man's purpose and where to find the power to overcome life's hardships. But the danger is that we get inflated with our own sense of superiority—and forget that...

- **Titus 3:3-5**—We were once foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another. ⁴ But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, ⁵ He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, but the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit."

Finally, the Jew not only had *a false assurance, a failed mission, and an inflated sense of superiority*, but they also had **a fruitless ministry (v.20b)**—a teacher of the immature, having in the Law the embodiment of knowledge and of the truth,

The "**immature**" speaks of *spiritual babes who are lacking in the knowledge of God's Word*. Being a *guide, a light, a corrector, and a teacher* all have to do with the Law. This could be a reference to those within Israel who needed to *teach their own children as Deuteronomy 6 instructed*. But they were failing to teach the next generation *what God required and the ways of God*. Today, it points to the religious person, the parent, the deacon, or the elder who has time to do everything else in the church, and participate in other legitimate activities, but *neglects to teach their own children and those within the community of faith*—the Word of God, so that they might grow into the full stature of Christ. Those with light are called to equip the immature. But how is it that the church is full of those who are immature? How is it that we know the Bible, but in some cases, we are not teaching our kids the truth?

The internal superstructure of how to know God, please God, walk with God, and glorify God is **“embodied in the knowledge of the truth”** or *the Word of God*. And so, we really have no excuse. And everyone who has been given special revelation has this special privilege—to be *a guide, a light, a corrector, and a teacher*, but all those privileges put us in a *special place of temptation and danger*.

How can Paul speak this way to the person who has special revelation? Why is he taking this tone with us? *He knows how to speak to such a person because he was such a person*. This was Paul. He analyzes *the psychology of a religious person* with pinpoint accuracy. He can do this because that’s how he thought. Before he met Christ on the road to Damascus, *Paul was Pharisee*. He was *disciplined*. He was *devout*. He was *committed*. He was *at the doors of the temple regularly*. He was *active, sacrificing, serving, and reading*. He was doing all the things we do. He had those privileges given to him by family, by race, and by personal attainment. And yet, he came to understand something that demolished his self-image. He came to realize that *none of those things would help him at the judgment (Phil.3)*. They were rubbish in God’s sight. He needed a righteousness that he did not have—a foreign righteousness.

Paul built his entire identity upon all those *privileges and practices* and the same is true of many of you listening to me today. Had Paul continued down the trail he was on, *he would have stood condemned*.

How can a person with this kind of privilege and experience be lost? *Paul labors to show the Jews and every person with all the privileges and prerogatives that we have*—that these privileges mean nothing if they fail to bring us to the complete trust in and transformation by Jesus Christ Himself.

C. FOUR CHARGES (vv.21-22)

Paul begins with *four privileges* then *four practices*, as almost a backhanded way of indicting the religious man, but now he is much more direct. Great preaching/teaching gets to the “you.” It gets very personal. You...Mr. and Mrs. Knowledge of the Bible...“You” ...Mr. and Mrs. Special Revelation...here are the charges.

Charge No.1 (v.21a)—²¹you, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself?

You are really good at running everyone else’s life, *how are you with yourself?* You are good at telling people *how much they need the Lord*, do you teach yourself how much you need the Lord? Paul employs the powerful use of *the interrogative, the question*. Asking questions causes the person to think—because they are not being given the answer. They need to come up with it themselves. It is provocative teaching. It causes us to *self-audit our own spiritual lives*. The rhetorical implies a negative answer—*You have not been applying the Law to yourself*. You should know *how holy God is* and *how sinful you are*. You should know of your need for Jesus Christ.

Charge No.2 (v.21b)—You who preach that one shall not steal, do you steal?

Paul is in prosecuting attorney mode! He has every religious person on the witness stand. The appeal is to the eighth commandment—*“thou shall not steal” (Ex.20:15)*—so, we see Paul is *still dealing with the law*. Paul is the evangelist now. He is seeking to drive the religious man away from and out of self-righteousness to the righteousness found in Christ.

His question implies not a negative as the previous one, but a positive answer—do you steal? Yes, you do! But you say, “I don’t break into people’s houses and take money!” Maybe not. But you still are a thief because *you rob God of His glory!*

You rob God of His glory because you have not confessed your sins, agreeing with Him that He is holy, and you've not repented of your sins and turned to and believed in Jesus.

Charge No.3 (v.22a)²²—You who say that one should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery?

Paul is saying the same thing but driving the sharp scalpel a little deeper each time. You who teach, you who preach, you who say—he is going past the profession to the heart.

Some are listening now who think Paul is only speaking of the Bible teacher, the preacher, or the elder, but here he walks into the bedroom of every religious person and says, **“You who say that one should not commit adultery.”** That's the seventh commandment in the law (*Ex.20:14*). He won't let go of it. But the husband or the wife says, *“But I have been faithful,”* and Paul asks, do you remember what Jesus taught?

- **Matthew 5:28**—but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

James Montgomery Boice gives this insight:

“Is adultery wrong? Yes, that is what Jesus teaches. Is sex outside of marriage wrong? Yes, that is clear too. But Jesus is not just picking on people who have fallen into open sexual sins, as so many in our day have. He is probing deeper into the meaning of this commandment, and what He is saying is that the root of the problem is in the impure desires of the heart. It is there, in the heart, that something is radically wrong.”¹

Charge No.4 (v.22b)—You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?

Paul is aggressive. He is not holding back. He is *pressing the wound* because he wants to stop the bleeding. Sometimes in evangelism or discipling, we must expose sin in the life of other people with skill, precision, and love.

Paul appeals to the Law again—the first and second commandments, to *“have no other gods before Me.”* (*Ex.20:3*). This is still in effect today. The first question implied a *negative answer*—*you are not teaching yourself*. The second question implied a *positive answer*—*you do steal God's glory*. The third question implied a *positive*—*you do commit spiritual adultery*. The fourth question implies another *positive response*—the answer is yes. How so? *In that, you have allowed other things in your life to become more important and more central than God.*

Remember, an idol is anything that you *love, fear, and serve more than God*. That is an idol—this is why John said in the last verse of his first epistle, *“Little children, guard yourselves from idols”* (*1 John 5:21*). An idol may be something good, but it is elevated to a place that is more than what it should be elevated—your job, your ministry, your health, your goals. What do you *daydream* about? What are you *preoccupied* with? Whatever it is, it should be reserved for God alone.

These charges are *strong*—but when talking to religious people, they always find a sinful way to try and divert the charges elsewhere.

¹ James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of Matthew, vol.1: The King and His Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2001), 89-90.

These Jews and religious people were like the man who greeted the pastor at the end of the service. The pastor had preached a strong, penetrating message on the judgment of God, and he approached the pastor in the narthex and said, "Oh pastor, you gave it TO THEM today!"

Do you hear it? The pastor was preaching to someone else. The religious person often thinks this way—*God is not talking to me*. This is the danger. We fail to apply the Word to ourselves.

They say, "But I love the Bible. I love to witness. I memorize passages. I know the Word. I rely upon the Bible; it gives me confidence." But *the Bible never searches them. The Bible never convicts them, it never causes them distress, it never makes them feel uneasy, it never causes them to tremble*. But God said in

- **Isaiah 66:2b**—"But to this one I will look,
To him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word.

The religious man feels *no kinship to the dirty dog sinner*. They are *never really moved in compassion for those who are in darkness*. They *feel contempt for those who are not like them*. They are *hard. Critical. Self-assured. Never shaken by the truth*.

This is a very bad sign if you feel this way. Let me speak to your heart. What are you really trusting in? Really? Is it your privileges? Your practices? Your disciplines? Your efforts? That you have a Bible and know how to get around in it? That you *give? Pray?* We can go from week to week and never question our spiritual condition.

Dr. Martyn Lloyd Jones one of my preaching mentors in the faith, puts it this way:

"As you read your Bible, day-by-day, do you apply the truth to yourself? What is your motive when you read the Bible? Is it to have knowledge of it so that you can show others how much you know and argue with them, or are you applying the truth to yourself as you read?" The doctor says, "Say to yourself, 'This is me—what is this saying to me?' Allow the Scriptures to search you...sift through you...otherwise reading the Scriptures can be very dangerous...we must be humbled by the Word of God."

Paul begins with **the religious person's confidence**, then moves to **the religious person's failures**. From *their privileges to their practices*, and then through a series of penetrating questions (charges), he takes a pin and punctures the balloon of **the religious person's self-confidence**. As you read, you can feel his emotion for the glory of God and the Gospel. He is *stirred, riled up* about this because the danger of hypocrisy is so subtle, self-deceiving, and damning.

Sitting in the circle and company of the Bible without applying the truth puts us in the same boat as the person who has never even heard the Gospel.

D. ONE JUDGMENT (vv.23-24)

By judgment, I mean indictment. Paul brings it down to a bottom-line summation. Here is Paul's SO WHAT? From the religious person's confidence to the religious person's failures to the religious person's self-confidence to the religious man's understanding. The religious person has a serious misunderstanding. What is it?

²³ You who boast in the Law, through your breaking the Law, do you dishonor God? ²⁴ For "THE NAME OF GOD IS BLASPHEMED AMONG THE GENTILES BECAUSE OF YOU," just as it is written.

"You" still makes it extremely personal. "You," Mr. and Mrs. Jew. "You," Mr. and Mrs. Special Revelation. I am not speaking about *the crowd out there somewhere* but to a particular group of people.

"You who boast in the Law." You who boast in *your possession, knowledge, and ministry* of the Law, let me get underneath your skin. Let me peel back the layers to show, *not the person you want people to think you are, but who you really are.*

"You who boast in the Law, through your breaking the Law, do you dishonor God?" You are at heart a *lawbreaker* and so is everyone else. And because you are a lawbreaker, *"the wages of sin is still death"* (Rom.6:23).

You make fine moral judgments. You're against *stealing, adultery, and idolatry*—that's wonderful. But what about you? You are a *violinist, an offender, a breaker of the law*—and that does not go away. But what happens when I do break the Law of God?, you ask. Paul explains in **verse 24**—For "THE NAME OF GOD IS BLASPHEMED AMONG THE GENTILES BECAUSE OF YOU," just as it is written.

The religious person is a flagrant dishonorer of God.

Alexander White had a reputation for being one of the godliest ministers in Scotland in the 17th century. Someone from his congregation came up to him and said, "*Dr. White, you have a reputation for being a very, very, godly man,*" and he interrupted that person and said, "*But if you really knew me as God knows me, you would spit in my face.*" That was not rhetoric; that's how he felt about himself in the light of the knowledge of God.

Paul concludes by quoting from the Old Testament to show that *this indictment is nothing new* (Is.52:5; Ezek.36:20ff). What Paul is saying without saying it directly is, "*O, I thought you knew the Law so well.*" To dishonor God leads to blaspheming God before others in the world.

How? Because it is all external. It is all on the outside. It is selective rule-keeping. It is not from the heart. The heart has never been *circumcised*. You've never been born again. You have stiff-armed God so that you can keep on living your *self-righteous, superficial, religious life with no repentance and no faith.*

All you have, Mr. and Mrs. Bible Knowledge, is *a convenient little religion where you are not disturbed by anything.* You, in reality, are a blasphemer. *The people you ought to be reaching, you are turning away—* and as a result, *you are compounding your guilt in the judgment before God.*

Someone has said, regarding the level of light we have been given, "*Never have so many... done so little... with so much.*"

CONCLUSION:

- Are we like the man who received a treasure as a steward from his master, and buried it just so that he would not have to change his life?
- Are you keeping truth at arm's length so that you barricade your *time, affections, and lifestyle* from being ransacked and transformed by the truth of God's Word?

- Time and time again, we hear that the biggest barrier to the Gospel is *the professing lives of those who claim to be Christian*.

Let me give one closing example and land this airplane. We see an example of the religious man's danger in the Old Testament with Isaiah, one of the greatest, if not the greatest, prophet.

In chapter 5, he is pronouncing "woes" upon the people. The people have sinned, and he gives six woes—"Woe, woe, woe, woe, woe, woe to you..." (*Is.5:8, 11, 18, 20, 21, 22*)—and you know that a seventh is coming because seven is the number of completion. But it doesn't come in Chapter 5, it comes in Chapter 6.

It comes when Isaiah goes into the temple and sees *God sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted (6:1-2)*. He sees and hears the burning Seraphim crying out, "*Holy, Holy, Holy*" and *the foundations trembled*, the train of His robe fills the temple with smoke. Then the prophet said,

- **Isaiah 6:5**—Then I said,
"Woe is me, for I am ruined!
Because I am a man of unclean lips,
And I live among a people of unclean lips;
 For my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts."

The picture was not complete until he saw himself as guilty and in need of repentance and forgiveness. And this sermon is not complete until you see your need for the same.

When you do, then what happened to Isaiah will happen to you.

- **Isaiah 6:6-7**—Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a burning coal in his hand, which he had taken from the altar with tongs. ⁷He touched my mouth *with it* and said, "Behold, this has touched your lips; and your iniquity is taken away and your sin is forgiven."

It was a picture of the Gospel and how God must initiate the action and come and touch your life with His Spirit and change your life and your heart. We need the same thing.

Then perhaps, we will get back on track and hear God commissioning us once again.

- **Isaiah 6:8**—Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?" Then I said, "Here am I. Send me!"

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