

Heart Reliance

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[0 : 00] If you have a Bible, go ahead and turn with me to Romans 2. We're continuing our march through Romans, and today we find ourselves at Romans 2, verses 17 through 24.

Romans 2, 17 through 24. This is God's Word. You then who teach others, do you not teach yourself?

While you preach against stealing, do you steal? You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?

You who boast in the law, dishonor God by breaking the law. For as it is written, the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.

Let's pray. Lord, we thank you for your Word. We thank you that it shows us that we need Jesus.

We pray that you might remind us of this fact, and that you would impress upon our hearts our need of Christ.

[1 : 42] And it's in his name that we pray. Amen. Amen. So what does a pastor do during the week? So this week, I'll tell you, Matthew and I and 50 to 100 of our closest pastor, elder, nerd friends spent the day in Cheyenne, Wyoming, which I don't think many, I don't know if anybody's from Cheyenne.

You're not going there on vacation, okay? But 50 to 100 of our closest pastor and elder friends met from across Wyoming, Montana, Colorado, for the morning and late into the evening.

And I wish I could tell you that it was riveting, that it was worshipful, that it was up-building at every single point. And if I did that, I would be lying to you.

It was interesting. Now, at every moment, at all times, worshipful. It was not.

It was exciting. It was not. Encouraging? Sometimes. But for the entirety of it, it was not all those things.

[2 : 52] But at some points, it was. And for those brief moments, even when there was debate and argument and disagreement, because surprise, Christians disagree.

Look at Paul and his missionary buddies. They disagree, and they go different ways. It was all those things. But sometimes in the midst of disagreement and boredom, I was reminded of the fact that we are doing God's work.

And in the midst of that, if we forget what we're doing and why we're doing it, that a presbytery meeting or a meeting of the wider church can look a lot like Congress if we forget what we're doing. Now, what do I mean by that? Like I am straight taking C-SPAN in the early morning to my brain. It is not exciting. In fact, it's anything but.

Now, for us, why is it like Congress? It's like Congress because we use the same form. Because surprise, Congress is kind of based on our church government, as I've informed somebody I work with.

[3 : 59] We also use that really weird thing of Robert's Rules, where we make motions and we second them. We have committees that do work and then bring things to the floor. And if you're confused about that, let's reference your childhood or maybe for some of you.

Schoolhouse Rocks, I'm Just a Bill, How Bills Get to Capitol Hill. It's the same thing in Presbyterian church government. Now, what makes the work of the church in the Mountain West different than Congress?

I'll tell you this. It has the same process, yes. There are people in suits. Yes, there's disagreement. There's debate. And even for a time, we broadcasted our meetings on TV, just like C-SPAN, except for we had very few people tune in on Zoom.

But if we miss the fact that we are here for God, then it looks just like Congress. If we forget, as we were reminded at the very end of the meeting, it can look a lot like Congress and a lot less like

church if we forget the essential element that it's about God.

If we lose that fact, then it's just like Congress. We lose who we are in the midst of all these other things. Paul tells us this morning in this text, the Jews, God's people, forgot who they are.

[5 : 23] They forgot an essential element of their identity. They forgot that they had to rely upon God. They forgot God in the midst of all these things that are good, but along the way, they lost who they were.

Just like if the church forgets the promise, not just of the Great Commission, to go and do these things, but if they forget who God is. He is the person that brings them together.

He is the one that upholds them, that informs all that they're doing. We can't forget that. You might be saying, I see in this text, did they really forget?

Hold on here. They had God's law, right? They had his promises. They had his signs. All those things made them better than those unruly, ungodly Gentiles that were outside the walls.

Right? That's what made them great. How did they forget these things? They had all those things, but they forgot it was about God himself. In fact, Matthew made this reference earlier.

[6 : 37] These first few chapters of Romans are doing that very thing. They're showing God's people that they are just like everyone else. They need God. They can't do it on their own.

Even if they have all these things, that they're just like the Gentiles. Those people that don't have the promises, don't have the land, don't have the signs, that don't have the law.

Paul is showing them without God, they got nothing. So this morning we're going to see, because of sin, the law can't save.

That might seem obvious to us, but it wasn't obvious to them. And we're going to make the argument, it's not often obvious to us. Even if you're a Jew, even if you're a Christian, even if you're a Gentile, even if you're us, even if you have God's word, we can't forget that we need God.

And because of sin, we need a Savior. And as we examine that this morning, we're going to look at something to take you back to elementary school, a conditional phrase, an if and then.

[7 : 48] If something happens, if X happens, then Y will happen. Okay? So first we're going to look at all these ifs. And if you're reading along as I was reading the text, you see that word repeated over and over again.

If. As you've been watching through Romans, if you have been with us for any amount of time, Paul is not giving any free passes to anyone. Jew, Gentile, doesn't matter.

Sin is not just a Gentile problem, it's also a Jew problem. It's in every person that's ever lived for all time, then and now and to come problem. Look with me at verses 17 and 18.

But if you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law and boast in God and know his will and approve what is excellent, because you are instructed from the law. There's this whole big list.

And it starts with if, but if applies to all of these things. If you call yourself a Jew. That seems obvious. Jew is God's people, right? But remember, it's a full range of terms.

[8 : 52] It's a full range of meanings for one term. It could be somebody that's from Judea. It could be somebody that's part of God's people. And if you remember back when we studied judges, right, the identity factor was not that you were a Jew, but you were a what?

A tribe member. You were a Benjamin. Benjaminite. You were of the tribe of Judah. Those things were important. But now those terms have collapsed and coalesced around just being God's people.

But even still, it was a badge of honor because in worshipping God, you could assign a name to yourself. That's pretty cool. If you call yourself a Jew. That's how he starts.

Then he goes on and says, if you rely upon the law, if you rest upon the law, if your being has definition in the law, if that is your security blanket, is that your comfort and sweet support?

Is the law the thing that you treasure most? Are you resting and receiving upon the law? And if you boast in God, if you glory in God, glorious in God as another version has put it.

[10 : 06] It's kind of a good term. The irony is when we read boasting, and if you read the rest of the New Testament, you're kind of keyed into what Paul will say at different points. You're boasting in Christ.

Boasting not in yourself, but boast in the Lord. And when you even hear that term, it should point us to the rest of Scripture. Not just what Paul has said, but when Paul's readers were hearing this, they were thinking back.

They were thinking back to something from Jeremiah 9 that gives us a fuller picture where he says this, let not the wise man boast in wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth.

Boast. Boast. Boast in God. At this point, there's kind of a hint to the careful Jewish reader. He knows that maybe there's something going on here.

Paul is not just extolling all these great things about what's going on. Boasting. Got it. I have the law. I'm a Jew. And he goes further.

[11:25] Knowing his will, or knowing the will. That's kind of a euphemism or shorthand for having the scriptures. He's alluding to this Jewish obsession, and rightfully so, with God's word.

But not only that, they've studied it, and they can discern the difference between good and evil.

They can approve what's excellent, and then they can challenge what is not, what is not good.

They're applying God's law, kind of just like us as Christians.

They're exegesis, they're squeezing out every last drop of what's important for application. That's a big list so far. And if you haven't gotten it, Paul is using these sets of lists in this text to explain something, really just to overwhelm us.

And that's the point. It's a lengthy list, but why is it so long? Yes, Paul, I get it. I'm a Jew. I get it. I depend on the law.

I get it. I boast in God. I know your word, and I apply it. I know the difference between good and evil.

Okay, okay, I get it already. When I was a kid, I was pretty strong-headed.

[12:39] Stubborn is probably a better word. Sometimes they'd get me in trouble, and I would come to my parents or my grandparents, and I would lay out a plan for doing something. Now, sometimes I would think through every little detail, right?

And I'd present that plan to them. And then sometimes I would come with kind of a half-baked plan, which is okay sometimes, but I would know that I'm going to muscle my way through it, whatever it was, right?

For how I was going to accomplish a list of chores, how I was going to make money, how I was going to start a business, how I was going to clean my room.

That was a one-pointer with a lot of muscle, or not a lot of muscle. And at every turn, my dad would respond, or my grandfather would respond with, we'll see, or if he had questions about it, he would say, that ain't going to work.

And my response in both those situations would be two things almost simultaneously. I would look around and say, okay, what am I missing? Did I miss a detail in my plan?

[13:42] And then almost a half a second later, my thought would be, I'll show him. I'll get it done. The Jews at this point are checking around to see, are they missing something here?

Paul is listing out this list, and they're looking around. Did I miss something? Why is he doing this? He should know that. We know that. But then at the same time, they're doubling down as well.

Yeah, that's right. That's who I am. That's my identity. But that's just the first list of ifs. The second is this. Look in verse 19 with me.

And if you are sure that you yourself are a guide to the blind, and a light to those who are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of children, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth.

So we pivoted in this list. It's gone from things in relation to God to kind of things that are related laterally. They're still about God, but it has an application to other people. It's an expansion on this list.

[14:47] A guide to the blind. Yeah, I have eyes that can see. I have God's word, so I know. Not only do I know his will, but I promise to be a beacon of light, to show people that are lost in darkness what the right way is.

A standard bearer. A city on the hill. An example. A paragon of virtue. Okay. Not ignorant, but enlightened because of his word.

We're kind of building steam again. A teacher of the foolish. Instructing children. Whether those are actual children or children of the faith. People that are unwise.

I know all this, right? Because I have God's word. Because I have the law. Because I have knowledge and truth. Okay, now we feel that. The Jewish reader has kind of been drawn into this trap.

And something's going on. They don't know it yet. It's like, I'm not a music person, but I think this is the right term. Tempo. How fast something is going. Right? It's rising and rising and rising.

[15 : 51] And so someone that's musically uneducated like me, I can't keep up anymore. Or when I'm running, I'm on that treadmill, and I'm going faster and faster, and I know that I can kind of keep up, but it better stop soon, or I'm going to end up behind me because that treadmill is going to spit me out.

Something is rising. Something is mounting in Paul's argument. And we need some relief. Because these lists are long, and there's a lot there. And you might be thinking, hey, why have I gone kind of point by point through this list?

Because if we don't, we miss the sense Paul is trying to communicate that it's overwhelming.

There's a sense in which everything is about everyone but the most important thing.

God. These aren't bad things in and of themselves at all. Right? Let's review. God's people. Okay.

Yeah, that's really important. Holiness is important.

Yeah, of course. We should prize his law, his word. Obviously. Those aren't bad things. But when we depend upon them for life, that's when we've misstepped.

[17 : 07] If we reduce the Christian life or following God down to these things, that is where we miss the mark. There's a very famous Dutch theologian that says, hey, about this, when we try to keep the law, what we're doing is saying to God, we don't need you.

When we try to keep the law and we don't worship God, we exchange the gift for the giver. When we keep the law apart from Christ, when we think that we can do it, that's human sin par excellence. Now, a Christian is called to keep the law, obviously. Right? It's a guide for Christian living. The law tells us what holiness looks like. But when we do it, and we think we can achieve eternal life, that's where we've misstepped.

Human sin to the uttermost. We do the same things even in our day, except for we don't have that badge of the name.

We depend on things like our skills, our degrees, the titles before our name, or those little letters that come after. What we have in our bank account, our membership in this church, that's a good thing.

[18 : 24] Coming to worship, that's a good thing. But that is not Jesus. That is not God. That's how we worship God. That's how we commune with him.

But when we exchange God for these things that are good, and the things that he uses for us to know him, it's not him itself. And that's what Paul's readers are doing.

They're exchanging God for his good gifts, for the things, the means by which we know him, and worship him. Those are all the ifs.

Okay, what about the then? If you look at the end of verse 20, and the beginning of verse 21, most Bibles will have this long dash, right, because he's building that tempo again.

He's gaining speed. The pace is increasing, and we need a relief. If, and then he has that dash, and then everything that follows. You then who teach others, do you not teach yourself?

[19 : 26] While you preach against stealing, do you steal? He's giving some relief, but is he really? The thens that follow the ifs aren't X, then Y.

It's honestly more burdensome. Now they know that trap that they've been drawn into. They have to examine their own hearts before that law to see if they really are keeping the law.

Because we know, because of sin, the law can't save them. We know that. Look with me at the end of verse 21.

Or sorry, excuse me, verse 20. It's building, building, building, building, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth, and then there's no relief.

These questions that come are even more burdensome, and they know that the trap has not just been set, but it's been closed on them. Paul is talking about something different.

[20 : 26] He's not commending them, he's condemning them. And he's doing it in the ways that are honestly the most painful for them. He realizes that in these verses, in these verses, the things that separated them from all those dirty, nasty people outside were in fact true of themselves.

Look at teaching, right? He's talking to them about teaching. He's pointing back to that earlier part, their knowledge of their law. They're resting in the law.

They were the ones that were guides to the blind. They taught children. Paul is making the point that if you're teaching, you have to practice what you preach.

It's not the old critique that we've heard in our day, that if you can't do, then teach. He's saying, no, you only teach when you do. You only practice what you preach.

That's how it should work. Any parent is helpfully reminded about this when you get into the far reaches of your expertise. Like, I am not an astrophysicist, right?

[21 : 36] I don't know everything about the biology of Colorado. I don't know every tree and every plant. And what do I hear? The constant refrain is, Dad, do you really know what you're talking about? Paul is asking them, do you really know what you're talking about?

Do you really understand God's law? Do you really understand who God is? Or is it more like this? When Jesus said to those crowds, to the scribes and Pharisees that sit on Moses' seat, so do and observe what they tell you, but not the works they do, for they preach, but do not practice.

They teach, but they don't know. It's not just teaching, though. It's stealing, adultery, robbery. He's building this case again against them.

The Jews, the scribes, the Pharisees, anyone who thought their salvation came from keeping God's law, do they actually keep it? And the answer is, what?

Absolutely not. And those things that they very much hated about other people and they would point out and say, we're better than you, those are the things that they do.

[22 : 48] Those are the things that they're disgusted by in other people, but they do themselves. They hated their neighbor's sin, but it was their own sin that did this.

And as if that list couldn't grow enough, look at verse 23. You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the law. It's clear now, not only do you fail to keep the law, but you dishonor God in the process.

It's clear now that they're actually the reason that those people outside, the Gentiles, all those other nations, didn't worship God himself.

Look at verse 24. For as it is written, the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you. So when all those nations were looking at Israel and saying, hey, yeah, that captivity, that's not going really well for you.

That really stinks. You know, all those promises that you're supposed to have, I don't really see them come to fruition. That wasn't the thing that testified against the God of all the universe.

[23 : 59] It was the actions, it was the conduct of the Gentiles. That is the thing that made those other nations look at them and say, that's not for me, man. I'm not sure that's real.

It was their hypocrisy. There's a very famous quote that says, missions exist because worship does not. If we re-engineer that for here, worship doesn't exist because holiness doesn't exist.

God's people aren't acting like God's people. Now, if we're honest, we hear this critique a lot in the modern day.

If it's your non-Christian neighbor, your family member, whatever, they have a fine-tuned eye for hypocrisy because it's on display. And we see these very famous failings of so-called Christians or so-called celebrity Christians.

Christians, and we see them and they say, look, look at that. And they're right. Or they see those things in our lives and they say, you're not like what God's word says you should be like.

[25 : 07] And they're right. But they're not completely right. Because the thing that marks out a Christian is realizing that God's law shows us our need for Jesus.

He shows us that we can't do it on our own. That we need a Savior. Paul is saying that same thing as Jesus said, practice what you preach.

But in practicing, remember God Himself. The law is not all bad as we've seen because the law is the one that shows us our need of Jesus. It shows us that we need a Savior.

It shows us that even when we're a Christian and we're living by faith, we are actually more sinful than we originally thought. The law is a really bad means to earn salvation because we are sinners. Because we have sinned and continue to sin. It ain't gonna work. And if we place ourselves in the position of this Jewish opponent, right, that Paul's writing to, we realize real quickly that that holiness we're called to as Christians, we fail to do.

[26 : 23] That holiness that we think, that right living that's gonna earn us heaven, it ain't gonna happen. It ain't gonna work. But we need something more. We need Jesus.

Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. And the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness.

Paul is making this giant case that sin applies to everyone, both Gentiles, both Jews, to everyone. Because blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man against the whom the Lord will not count his sin. because of sin the law cannot save. If that's true, if you call yourself holy, if you love God's word, if you worship the one true God and you teach it to others, if you know the gospel, if you think it's true, all those ifs, then you know that you failed to keep the law perfectly.

Then you know you need something else. Then you know you need a redeemer. Then you know that you're actually more sinful than you thought. But you're more delivered from sin than you could ever imagine in Jesus.

[27 : 48] You know you need something else. You know that you need Christ. But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

That is a great comfort because the law cannot save us. It points us to Christ and shows us our need of him. Let's not forget it is about him.

Let's pray. Lord, we thank you for this reminder from your word about our need of Jesus. We pray that you would work that into our hearts, that you would use the law as a guess, as a guide for Christian living, as a guide for what is holiness.

But Father, we would see more and more how we fall short and more and more how we need to cling to Christ in faith for righteousness. And may you show that to us even now in this meal that you have set before us.

And we pray this in Christ's name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[28 : 58] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Yeah. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.