

## Romans 2:17-24

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 12 March 2021

Preacher: Paul Levy

[ 0 : 00 ] To be seated and turn your Bibles to Romans chapter 2.! As I've worked through this passage and we've gone through this passage more slowly than we normally do, you may begin to feel it somewhat overwhelming.

It's fine at the beginning, Romans, isn't there? All those wonderful statements about the Son of God and the Gospel of God and the righteousness of God. But then he moves really quickly, doesn't he? To the wrath of God and unrighteousness. To the nature of sin and rebellion against God. And he's telling us the seriousness of unrighteousness.

And you know, after a while it can be overwhelming. I'm not sure you count. I don't necessarily keep a count of how many sermons I've preached on Romans. I think it's about 10. It's not too bad. John Piper had preached 30.

So you should be thankful by the time you got to this passage. But I was thinking, how many of them have been on sin? And the nature of sin and rebellion, I think probably about 5.

[ 1 : 26 ] And so you could say this morning, okay Paul, we get it. But that is the point. It's one of the reasons Paul, the apostle, gives for this prolonged and sustained demonstration of what sin is like.

He's spoken to the people who weren't Jews. Who've grown up without any knowledge of the written word of God. And he leaves them feeling, we've got no excuse. I'm a sinner.

But now he turns his attention to the Jews. People who've been saturated. Drenched in all the details of the written law of God. And he's going to say to them and prove to them, you've got no excuse.

But the problem is when people face this point about their sin, they become more and more uncomfortable about it. And I think Paul is sustained in his argument for two reasons.

He wants to demonstrate to us the nature of unrighteousness. So that you and I will come to see the wonderful gift of God. It's like if you go to a jeweler and you ask to see a diamond ring, they'll put it on a black cloth, won't they?

[ 2 : 36 ] So that you will see the beauty of the diamond more clearly. And that's what Paul is doing. He's showing the blackness of our guilt and our sin so that we'd be amazed at what God has provided in Jesus Christ.

That we'd be driven by utter amazement. And so I think on one level, he continues to expose our sin and to pin it down in order that you and I might get to the stage where we realize just how wonderful Jesus is.

And so let me say to you this. Be patient. All right? Be patient. But there's a second reason why he's so persistent in his exposure of sin and the nature of sin.

And the reason that Paul dwells on sinfulness is that I think we are resistant to seeing it and feeling it. That we often find ways of avoiding the issue of softening and escaping the evidence of our own sinfulness.

There are endless ways, aren't there, to admit to just a little bit of it, while not being broken by it and not being humbled by it. But brokenness and humility are the key to paradise.

[ 3 : 52 ] They're the road to paradise. Because the road of brokenness and the road of humility is the road to Christ and to Christ's righteousness. And in this life, we'll never outgrow our need for ever new experiences of brokenness and humility.

Because of our sinfulness. Why is it that we must be sustained in our examination of sin when we're so resistant to it? Well, because we don't want to feel it.

The weight of our sinfulness is something that we often seek to avoid. And being broken doesn't come naturally to any of us.

And being humbled in the presence of God doesn't come naturally. Now, there may be some people who are here this morning that as I read Romans 2, you may be uncomfortable that Paul turns his attention to the Jews.

Many people are troubled. Is Paul, the apostle here, anti-Semitic? But nothing could be further from the truth. When it comes to the apostle Paul, a few chapters later, you'll find him writing.

[ 5 : 10 ] He says, I wish I could be accursed. So great is my love for my countrymen. His deep desire for the Jewish people is that they would come to know the fulfillment of the promises which they had.

The Lord Jesus. His deep desire is for their salvation. There's nothing anti-Semitic at all in his approach. He yearns for their salvation. But it is the position that the Jews have taken.

And in which they're holding on to. That he speaks the gospel to them. Now, as you look at the apostle Paul, he travels through the near ancient Eastern world. And his priority always was to speak the good news of Jesus to the Jews.

It was his priority. So he goes to a new town. And the first place he goes is to the synagogue. He goes to the synagogue first and then to the Gentiles. And what we see that as Paul goes preaching the gospel, we find tragically that the Jews just will not accept it.

And they will not listen. And they won't grab hold of what he's saying. They are resistant to the truth of their own sin. And he exposes that.

[ 6 : 24 ] And that's one of the reasons why you and I this morning should be all ears. We should be on the edges of our seats. Because what God is saying to these Jews through Paul is very similar to our position in church this morning.

They are surrounded by the written word of God and the law and the prophets. It exposed their sin and it pointed them to Christ.

But here, after all of Paul's preaching, they just won't listen. And so he continues to expose their sin. And you and I, as hard as it is, need to hear that.

Because we sit in gospel churches knowing the word of God. Many of us have been taught the word of God for decades.

And we reach a position where we might even consider ourselves as teachers. Where we know sound doctrine. And then we reach the point where I think the Jews have reached.

[ 7 : 22 ] We come to the point where we think it's our business to set other people right. Rather than to repent ourselves. And that is what was wrong.

That they are sitting in the same position which it would be very easy for you and I to sit in. Thinking that it's our business to set others right. Rather than to repent ourselves.

And so Paul addresses them here. He speaks his word. And it's as though he's forcing them again to listen to the gospel. And he speaks to them about their sin. And he's astonished.

Because he finds this. As Paul preaches about sin. It's almost as if his Jewish audience are saying. Great job Paul. Preach it brother. Good job.

These Gentiles out there. These people out there. They really need to hear that. Amen. Amen. And they're all sitting there saying sin. Yeah. Yeah.

[ 8 : 23 ] We know they're guilty of that. And he's watching them. And he says to them. You think you're not sinners don't you? And when I speak about judgment.

You don't think that you'll be judged do you? And they're all sitting back saying. Sock it to them Paul. It could never happen to us. And he looks at them. And he says.

You lay up the wrath of God. But for yourself. When you refuse to see your own sin. And trust in Jesus Christ. It's as if he's saying to the Jews.

You think you're not sinners. You think you will escape the judgment of God. And it all centers around this fact. That the Jews were misusing. The gifts of God's grace.

And that's the position we need to look at this morning. So first of all. They misused. The gift of God's grace. Look at what gifts they enjoyed. Look at verses 17 and 18. These are their gifts.

[ 9 : 23 ] That they've been given. You call yourself a Jew. And they were. And they felt pride in that. You rely on the law. You rest on it. You boast in God. You know his will.

You approve what is excellent. You've been instructed in the law. There's a list of certain things.

And he says this is the case. This is true of you. You have the privilege. Of being called the people of God.

Chosen in the Old Testament. And you rely on the law. His written word. And you rest on it. And what is written there. And you boast in God. I think he means.

That they recognize that this God. Their God. Is the true God. And you contrast that with all the gods. Of the other nations. And he's saying.

You know this. Don't you? You know he's the real deal. You know what God's will is. You are convinced. You're persuaded. That God's will is excellent.

[10:22] That it's good. And it's upright. And you approve of it. Because you've been instructed. You've been well taught. It's been revealed to you. These are gifts. That God has given you. And we find ourselves.

Don't we? That echo. For our church family. Many of us have grown up in churches. Which preach the gospel. Where the gospel is proclaimed.

And we know the truth. Some of us are well instructed. In the truth. And we're persuaded. That the truth of Christianity. Is excellent. And we know God's will. And we boast. That actually the only real God.

Is the God of Christianity. And we rest on the written word of God. And we are able to call ourselves. A lot Christians. Reformed. Orthodox. Just note here.

Paul is not saying. There's anything wrong with these things. They were all gifts. Of God's grace to them. They're good things. And then he goes a little bit further.

[11:21] On the gifts they enjoyed. He turns to verses 19 to 20. And he says. If you are sure of yourself. You're sure aren't you? You're a guide to the blind. You're a light to those who are in darkness.

You're an instructor of the foolish. You're a teacher of children. Having the law. You're the embodiment of knowledge and truth. Children.

When there's an RE lesson. And you get asked about Christianity. You put your hand up don't you? Because you think. Well I know it. I know more than the rest of these lot. And Paul says.

If you understand all this. You've received all these gifts. You were meant to be a light to the nations. And you were to instruct them. And you were to witness to them.

That's your responsibility. And so the people of Israel. They came to look upon themselves. As guides. And lights. And teachers. Because the written word of God.

[12:21] Was the embodiment of knowledge and truth. It wasn't ignorance. It wasn't error. They knew God's word. It was their God given calling.

It was what they were called to do. It was what they should do. They were to take it to others. They were to speak and live out the word of God. And so he says fine.

That's good. Could be describing you. Couldn't he? Could be describing me. Us. The church. Look at the many gifts we've enjoyed. As we in the same position as the Jews. In the gifts they enjoyed. So the second thing that we need to see. Is what they did wrong.

What they did wrong. That's a crucial question. And again we should be all ears here. Let's hear the warning. Verse 21. You teach others. Do you not teach yourself?

[13:15] The question expects a negative answer. It's framed in that way. So you could put it. You do not teach yourself. Do you? It's kind of rhetorical.

He's saying. You do not teach yourselves. Do you? That's the first thing he lets. They were doing wrong. The second thing he goes on to list. He illustrates it.

He says. You preach against stealing. But you steal. You preach against adultery. Do you commit adultery? You hate idols. But rob temples.

You boast in the law. But you dishonor God. By breaking the law. So you don't teach yourself. Do you? And he adds a third thing.

They dishonor God. And then he adds a third thing. Because as it is written. He brings out a scriptural proof. And he nails it to them. From Isaiah. And he says.

[14:12] The name of God is blasphemed. Among the Gentiles. Because of you. So they didn't teach themselves. They dishonored God. And then they caused the name of God.

To be blasphemed. Among the Gentiles. To whom they were called to be a witness. That's deadly serious. They did so much.

So much revelation. So much truth. So much knowledge. And they thought. It's our business to set. Them out there right. Rather than repent ourselves. Now let's look at these three things in turn.

Not teaching ourselves. The reaction. Their reaction. The law of God. They had the word of God. They were called to be teachers.

And they became pompous and arrogant. And they came to look at it. Not as an evidence. Of a sign of God's grace. But a sign that. Because they had the word of God.

[15:11] They were superior. And they came to this position. I don't think that's anti-Semitic. To say that at all. That what God is saying. Of their position.

At that time. Is they came to see themselves. As superior. To all other sinners. On the face of the earth. I think you can see that. In the gospels. And that's what he exposes.

He takes the mask off. And so people who found themselves. In gospel churches. Saturated with the word of God. We can fall into that position too. This sense of superiority.

That we're not sinners. In that kind of way. He gives these examples. He says. You preach that people don't steal. Do you steal? You preach that people shouldn't.

Commit adultery. But you commit adultery. You preach that people shouldn't. Worship idols. Do you rob temples? Now. Think about this. Why is he just choosing. These three examples?

[16:09] I think that lots of the Jewish people. As they heard this. They would have been horrified. At what he's saying. They wouldn't have seen themselves. As thieves. They wouldn't have seen themselves. As adulterers.

They might say. Well. In little ways. We might be guilty of it. But we're not guilty of it. To the degree you're saying. I want to argue. That what he's doing here. Is gets right to the heart.

Of the issue. That when it comes to stealing. And theft. Is he perhaps saying to them. They steal in this sense. Actually they rob God. Of his true glory.

And because they rob God. Of the glory of grace. Because you remember. They've got this sense of superiority. They feel they've earned it. They feel that they're worth it.

But they are something special. What they're doing there. Is they rob God. Of the glory of his grace. And I think we can view. The next charge of adultery.

[17:11] In the same way. I don't think. That the Jewish people. Listening to him. Were kind of guilty. Of mass adultery. But actually.

What we see. Is that the Old Testament prophets. Over and over and over again. Do you remember. What they define sin as. They define sin. As adultery. They were an adulterous nation. They went after false gods.

Because instead of being faithful. To the one who would love them. Who'd turn them from idols. And had become their God. Israel was promiscuous. Jews. And so this question.

Of robbing temples. What does that mean? Some commentators. Want to tell you. That the Jews. Around that time. They were. They were against adultery. But they were involved.

In making kind of. Little idle knickknacks. And souvenirs. And selling them. So pagans could use. And there was a double standard. I find that. Quite difficult to believe. Again.

[18:12] I think we're supposed to see this. Theologically. Who is the temple of God? It's the Lord Jesus Christ. Isn't it? That's what Paul's saying.

He's saying. Look at what you're doing. To the temple of God. Look how you're reacting. To Christ Jesus. Your Lord. And your Savior. It goes back to that. Really profound sin. That Peter says. When he speaks to the Jews.

At Pentecost. And he says. You took him. You crucified him. The Lord of life. And they were cut to the heart. And they were convicted. And it could be this.

That the apostle is wrestling with. But it points you and I. Very clearly. To look at ourselves. Those who teach others. The faith. Those of us who teach others.

That their faith. Ought to be in Christ. Is your faith in Christ? You who teach others. That they ought to repent. Of their sin. Have you repented of their sin? You who teach others.

[19:07] That we come to God. Naked. And empty handed. Do you come. Naked and empty handed. You who teach others. That we stand only. Upon the grace of God.

Do you stand there? The second example. That he. He's given. Of their sin. Is that it dishonors God. And he's charging them.

With exactly the same thing. He charged the Gentiles with. So do you remember Romans 1. 21. For although they knew God. They did not honor him. As God. In other words.

They didn't honor him. They dishonored him. And they did not give thanks to him. They became futile. In their thinking. And their foolish hearts. Were darkened. And now he turns to the Jews. The

very people. Who did the word of God.

And he said. You're no different. You also dishonor God. You do not give God. The honor that's due to his name. You do not exalt him. You don't lift up his name.

[ 20 : 02 ] You don't magnify him. You don't delight in him. And love him. And enjoy him. You don't. They dishonor God.

By their refusal. To bring themselves. To Jesus Christ. And so they rest. In the knowledge. That they have. But they don't bring their heart.

To Jesus. And they don't say. Create in me. A clean heart. A new spirit. Wash me. Cleanse me. And so they dishonor God.

And then the third. Sinus of ruining God's reputation. And they cause God's name. To be blasphemed. And others. Looked at their lives. These Jewish people. And said. You are the people of God. Well.

What's your God like? And so look at the way. Their heart is so closed. The way they behave. The presumption. The pride. The arrogance. And look at the way. They treat other people.

[ 20 : 57 ] The way they look down on others. The way they behave. The complacency. The inactivity. Hearts that are not moved. And so what kind of God.

Is it that you worship? What kind of savior. Is it that you proclaim? And so the name of God. Is blasphemed. And he quotes from Isaiah 52. And the quotation.

Is pretty difficult. It's. From the Greek translation. Of the Old Testament. But here it is. In Isaiah 52. 5. This is the quote. Now therefore. What I have here.

Declares the Lord. Seeing that my people. Are taken away for nothing. Their rulers wail. He's speaking of them. As they're carried off. Into exile. Their rulers wail.

Declares the Lord. And continually. All the day. My name is despised. And so their reaction. To their exile. And suffering. Caused the nations. Around them. To look at them.

[ 21 : 50 ] And say. What a pathetic. And pitiful God. You have. Because look at the way. They suffer. Look at the way. They're behaving. And their sorrow. And they're being. Exiled.

And they're being carried off. They've got no joy. They've got no hope. They don't sing the Lord's song. In a strange land. And they're miserable. They're not a light. To the nations. They're miserable.

In their suffering. And the name of God. Is blasphemed. Because of that. And these are really. Heavy. Solemn words. Heavy. Solemn words. To hear the Lord.

Pronounce. Upon your conscience. That are you guilty. Of teaching. Other people. What you've not learned yourself. Are you guilty. Of dishonoring God. By not delighting in him.

And reverencing him. And loving him. And enjoying him. And are you guilty. Of causing God's name. To be blasphemed. By the people you live with. Or you live amongst. And as I think.

[ 22 : 45 ] On this passage. These words. Wray very heavily on me. Let alone you. Of causing God's name. To be blasphemed. By the way that we react.

When we sin. Or when someone sins against us. And so the third thing. Before we come to the Lord's table. Is this. Is there any hope. Is there any hope.

You could find the answer. In Romans. The point Paul is making. Isn't it. It's a big point. Is you and I. Do not have. It in us.

You and I. Do not have. A righteousness. And God. Has a righteousness. And God. Gives it to you. In Jesus Christ. So come to Jesus.

And exalt Jesus. And rejoice in Jesus. And live for Jesus. And have Jesus in you. The hope of glory. We could look at it that way.

[ 23 : 47 ] Or we could pick up. Where we left in Isaiah 52. Because in Isaiah 52. Do you remember. This is what he goes on to say. He's just found them. Guilty.

Of God's name. Being despised. Among the nations. Because of how they've lived. And this is what he goes on to say. He says. Therefore my people. Shall know my name. And therefore. In that day. They shall know. That it is I. Who speak. Here I am. How beautiful. Are the mountains. Upon the mountains. Are the feet of him. Who brings good news. Who publishes peace.

Who brings good news of happiness. Who publishes salvation. Who says to Zion. Your God reigns. The voice of your watchmen. They lift up their voice. Together they sing for joy. For eye to eye.

They see. They return. Of the Lord to Zion. Break forth together. Into singing. You waste places of Jerusalem. For the Lord has comforted his people. He's redeemed Jerusalem.

[ 24 : 42 ] The Lord has bared his holy arm. Before the eyes of all the nations. And all the ends of the earth. Shall see the salvation of our God. Depart. Depart. Go out from there. Touch no unclean thing. Go out from the midst of her.

Purify yourselves. You who bear the vessels of the Lord. For you shall not go out in haste. And you shall not go in flight. For the Lord will go before you. And the God of Israel.

Shall be your rear guard. Now what does that mean? It means this. In the context of all this miserable sin. Of his people causing his name to be blasphemed.

Causes God to say. All right. I'll take care of this. I'll take care of this in my grace. And I will come. And I will come. And I will reign.

And when God comes to Zion. When? Where? Well I stopped reading. Because the next section says this.

[ 25 : 39 ] It says behold my servant. My servant Jesus. He shall act wisely. He shall be high and lifted up. And shall be exalted. And as many were astonished at you.

His appearance was so marred. Beyond human semblance. His form beyond the children of men. So shall he sprinkle many nations. And kings shall shut their mouths. Because of him. For that which has not been told them.

They will see. And that which they have not heard. They will understand. Who has believed. What he has heard from us. And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed. For he grew up before him like a young plant. And like a root out of dry ground.

He had no form or majesty. That we should look at him. No beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men. A man of sorrows. Acquainted with grief. As one from whom men hide their faces.

He was despised. And we esteemed him not. And surely he has borne our sorrows. Our griefs. Carried our sorrows. And yet we esteemed him stricken. Smitten by God and afflicted.

[ 26 : 38 ] But he was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. And upon him was the chastisement. That brought us peace. And with his wounds we are healed.

And so is there any hope for us. In the depth of my sin and yours. Yes. And it is found in Jesus Christ. In all that he was willing to do.

For every Jew. Who would believe. And every Gentile. Who would believe. You see it's not that you're surrounded by gospel words and bible stories.

It's not that you know the truth. Of the gospel. And you approve it. And you think that it's an excellent way to live. It's not that. It's not the fact. That you've had many many privileges.

But it is the fact. That if you run to Jesus with your broken heart. And with your guilt. And with all your stains.

[ 27 : 47 ] And you say to him. Cleanse me. He says to you this morning. All who come to me. I will never cast away. I won't cast anyone away.

Who comes to me. And so now is the time. To look to Jesus. And now is the time. To stop boasting. And now is the time to repent. Now is the time to run. And now is the time to rest. And now is the time to receive him. So that all our dishonoring of God.

And all our causing of his name to be blasphemed. And all of our not teaching ourselves. Can be washed away. In the pardon of his grace.

And of his forgiveness to us. And we can be made new. And so it's good news. And so take it. And believe it.

[ 28 : 48 ] And take hold of Christ. As he is offered to you. In the elements. In the sacraments. What a way to end. The service. With all the heavy words.

With all the weight of our sin. Come unto the Lord Jesus. And he will give you rest. Let's pray. Let's pray.