

PRACTICING WHAT YOU PREACH ROMANS 2:17–24

INTRODUCTION

One of the practices that **God hates the most** is **hypocrisy**.

Hypocrisy is the practice **not conforming to the standards or beliefs** that one claims to hold.

Paul knew that the **self-righteous Jews who rejected the gospel** were **guilty of great hypocrisy**.

Though they believed that they **were right with God**, Paul was well aware that they **did not conform to the moral standards** they claimed to hold.

The Jews **professed to practice God's Law**, and yet their **hypocrisy was evident** because their practices did not conform to God's Law.

Hypocrisy had long been **the plaque that built up** within the **spiritual arteries of the Jews**, hardening their hearts against God.

Just like the **mix of cholesterol, fat, and calcium** builds up on the walls of our physical arteries, **leading to atherosclerosis**, so hypocrisy builds up within our spiritual arteries, **restricting the flow of obedience** and resulting in a heart hardened in **unbelief and disobedience**.

Jesus, the Great Physician, **frequently diagnosed** this **deadly spiritual condition** in the hearts of the Israelites.

Turn with me to **Matthew 6** as it records **Jesus' Sermon on the Mount**.

As you know, we saw last week in **Matthew 5** that Jesus came as the **New Covenant Lawgiver** who provided authoritative commands as the **New Covenant Law, or the Law of Christ**.

Directly after that, **Jesus confronts the issue of hypocrisy, diagnosing its deadly presence** within the practice of many of the spiritual leaders of the Jews.

In particular, Jesus pointed to **three areas of hypocrisy**:

1. **Their giving**
2. **Their praying**
3. **Their fasting**

First, look at **Matthew 6:2** as Jesus points out the Jewish hypocrisy in their **giving**—

“Therefore, 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 glorified by men.”

Second, look at **Matthew 6:5** as Jesus points out the Jewish hypocrisy in their **praying**—

“And when you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men.”

Third, look at **Matthew 6:16** as Jesus points out the Jewish hypocrisy in their **fasting**—

“Now whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance so that they will be noticed by men when they are fasting.”

You don't have to turn there, but in **Luke 12** Jesus warned against the **influence of these hypocritical leaders**, warning that their hypocrisy would spread like **leaven through dough**:

1 “Be on your guard for the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.”

He continued in **verse 2** to warn that **all hypocrisy** would be **exposed in the final judgement**—

2 “But there is nothing covered up that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known.”

Jesus made the **link between hypocrisy and judgement** clear when he said later in **Luke 20:46-47**—

46 “Beware of the scribes, who want to walk around in long robes, and love greetings in the marketplaces, and best seats in the synagogues and places of honour at banquets,

47 who devour widows' houses, and for appearance's sake offer long prayers. These will receive greater condemnation.”

If you're still in **Matthew**, turn over to **chapter 23** where we'll see **one of Jesus' greatest denunciations** of Jewish hypocrisy:

23 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the Law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others.

24 **You blind guides, who strain out a gnat but swallow a camel!**

25 **Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, [hypocrites!](#) For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence.**

26 **You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may become clean also.**

27 **Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, [hypocrites!](#) For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness.**

28 **In this way, you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.**

29 **Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, [hypocrites!](#) For you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous,**

30 **and say, 'If we had been living in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partners with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.'**

31 **So you bear witness against yourselves, that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets.**

32 **Fill up, then, the measure of the guilt of your fathers.**

33 **You serpents, you brood of vipers, [how will you escape the sentence of hell?](#)**

So then, it's clear that **if you hope to be vindicated** in the final judgement as one who is righteous through faith, then you **need to avoid hypocrisy and practice what you preach.**

To put that negatively, **if your arteries are clogged up** with **the plague of hypocrisy** then the final judgement will reveal your **hardened and unbelieving heart**, and you should expect to be condemned by God.

Or to put it simply, **you will be justified** only if you **practice what you preach**.

That's exactly the message that Paul had for the **self-righteous, religious Jews** of his day who **rejected the gospel and the righteousness of God through faith**.

As the previous section in **Romans 2** prepared us to expect, **Paul confronts the misplaced trust** of these Jews in their **possession of the Law**.

They believed that having the Torah, the Law of Moses, **made them right with God**, but as Paul will explain in the section before us today, **they needed to practice what they preached**.

The hypocrisy of these unbelieving Jews demonstrated that while **they may have known God's will**, they certainly did not practice His will.

They may have had the Law, but this was of no value to them **because they did not obey the Law**.

However, having the Law meant that **they were without excuse**, just like the Gentiles, and therefore would be **condemned in the future and final judgement of God**.

Paul's sobering words are as important for us to hear today as they were when he wrote them to the church in Rome.

We may possess the Word of God in the Bible, but **unless we obey the Word** then all we are doing in our hypocrisy is **storing up wrath for ourselves** in the day of wrath when God's righteous judgement will be revealed.

There are many professing Christians whose hypocrisy will be revealed in the final judgement as their failure to practice what they preach demonstrates their **misplaced confidence in simply possessing the Scriptures** and being well taught in the Scriptures.

PROPOSITION

So then, as we study **Paul's confrontation of Jewish hypocrisy** in **Romans 2:17–24**, we'll find that **he presses home the importance of practicing what you preach** through **four implications of possessing the Law**:

1. Advantages of the Law (**17–18**)
2. Responsibilities of the Law (**19–20**)
3. Transgression of the Law (**21–22**)
4. Condemnation of the Law (**23–24**)

As Paul **builds upon the foundation** he laid in the previous section, **he answers an objection** that his hypothetical debate opponent might raise.

In **verses 12–16**, Paul argued that in order to be justified in the final judgement, **one cannot be a hearer of the Law only, but must be a doer of the Law** in order to be right with God.

In response, Paul's opponent might object, **"But I DO obey the Law!"**

Certainly, **no moral, religious Jew** would ever admit to NOT obeying the Law.

In their self-righteousness, they would vehemently argue that **they were indeed “doers” of the Law**.

So Paul **confronted their hypocrisy** and pressed home the importance of **practicing what they preached**.

Paul aimed to decisively demonstrate to the unbelieving Jews that they **were in fact NOT doers of the Law**, but **hypocritical transgressors of the Law**.

By proving that the Jews who rejected the gospel were **religious hypocrites**, Paul would also prove that they had **misplaced their confidence** in their simple possession of the Law.

Only those who obey the Law, as the fruit of genuine faith, will be justified as right with God in the final judgement.

1. ADVANTAGES OF THE LAW (17–18)

The first implication of possessing the Law is that the Jews **enjoyed many advantages**.

For those **entrusted with the Law**, there are many **advantages of the Law**.

Look at **verses 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

Here we find a **list of five advantages** that the Jews enjoyed.

Before we examine them one by one, it is important to note that Paul **did not view any of these descriptions negatively**.¹

In fact, Paul understood these to be **positive privileges** that the Jews enjoyed, and intended that his readers would understand them in the same way.

Later in **Romans 3:1-2**, Paul **asks and answers the question** that naturally arises after he **exposes the misplaced confidence of the Jews** in both their possession of the Law and their practice of circumcision.

He writes—

1 Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision?

2 Great in every respect. First of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God.

¹ “Paul expected the reader to interpret every item in the list positively. There is no hint that any of the privileges in the list are to be understood negatively.” Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, ed. Robert W. Yarbrough and Joshua W. Jipp, Second Edition, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic: A Division of Baker Publishing Group, 2018), 138.

In other words, while Paul argues that **the simple possession of the Law is not a sign that one is right with God**, he does not deny that **possessing the Law is a real advantage**, so long as the possession is accompanied by a response of faithful obedience.

In simpler terms, **having and hearing the Law** is an advantage **when it produces doing the Law**.

Paul never once indicates that the Jews were at fault in possessing the Law, **only that they were at fault in hypocritically failing to obey the Law**.

Now we can see that as Paul **lists out five advantages** that the Jew enjoys.

First, as **verse 17** says, he **“bears the name ‘Jew.’”**

The term **“Jew”** originally referred to a person who had **descended from the tribe of Judah**.

Later, especially after the **Babylonian exile**, it was applied **generally to all Israelite people**.

By Paul’s day, the term was widely used in this more general sense.

The significance or **“advantage”** of the name **“Jew”** is that it signifies that **one belongs to a special people**, distinct from all others, whom **God had chosen to be his own**.

This is what Paul referred to in **Romans 9:4** as **the covenantal advantage** that the Jews held, as he wrote of the—

Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises

So being Jewish **made one distinct**, and the primary distinction was that of **the covenants** that God had made with with Abraham and the descendants of Israel.

We can see that distinction even in the letter of Romans, where, for example, in **Romans 1:16** Paul writes of the gospel power “**for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.**”

All the other advantages **flow from this fundamental one.**

Second, as **verse 17** continues, the Jew has the advantage of “**[relying] upon the Law.**”

Though the **context of Paul’s criticism** towards Jewish self-righteousness should **make us seriously consider** whether this statement is a **positive or a negative description of the Jew**, we should remember that Paul is not critical of the Law itself.

Throughout the letter to the Romans, Paul **criticises two errors** that the Jews made with regards to the Law:

First, as we’ve seen in the previous section of **Romans 2**, Paul **criticises the error** of believing that the **mere possession of, and instruction in**, the Law made them right with God.

However, Paul is careful to maintain a **positive view of the Law** itself, even in **Romans 7** where he writes of the Law being good, as he does in **verse 12**—

So, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.

Second, Paul **criticises the error** of believing that **through a strenuous and continued effort** to obey that Law they could earn salvation.

He addresses this later in the epistle, such as when he writes in **Romans 9:31-32**—

³¹ **Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not attain that law.**

³² **Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as though it were by works.**

Now, **while it is certainly possible** that Paul was critiquing **the Jewish misuse of the Law** in **[2:17]**, there is also **no clear reason** that we have to understand it in this way.

Your understanding of Paul's meaning here comes down to **how you understand the immediate context** as Paul unfolds his argument.

Since the other four descriptions in the list seem to lend themselves towards **a more positive understanding**, we ought to conclude that Paul is describing **the positive advantage** of "**relying upon the Law.**"

What does Paul mean by that advantage then?

Consider, for example, David's description in **Psalm 19.**

Beginning in **verse 7**, David **extols the value of the Law**—

7 The law of Yahweh is perfect, restoring the soul; The testimony of Yahweh is sure, making wise the simple.

8 The precepts of Yahweh are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of Yahweh is pure, enlightening the eyes.

9 The fear of Yahweh is clean, enduring forever; The judgments of Yahweh are true; they are righteous altogether.

10 They are more desirable than gold, even more than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb.

11 Moreover, by them Your slave is warned; In keeping them there is great reward.

Insofar as the Jews rightly relied upon the Law to instruct them in **how to live according to God's will**, it would indeed prove to be an incomparable advantage.

However, as David said in **[Psalm 19:11]**, the Jews would only experience the advantage of relying upon the Law **if they kept the Law as the evidence of faith in God.**

So relying on the Law is a genuine advantage of possessing the Law, but the key issue is how the Jews respond to these covenant advantages.²

Third, as **verse 17** ends, the Jew has the advantage of **“[boasting] in God.”**

² Schreiner, *Romans*, 138.

Boasting in self is condemned throughout Scripture, but **boasting in God is commended** when it is the expression of praise that flows from a faithful heart.

The Law itself says in **Deuteronomy 10:21**—

He is your praise, and He is your God, who has done these great and fearsome things for you which your eyes have seen.

Paul himself writes of boasting in God, as we see in **Romans 5:11**—

And not only this, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ...

As a positive advantage, then, Paul would almost certainly have had **Jeremiah 9:23-24** in mind which reads—

²³ **Thus says Yahweh, “Let not a wise man boast in his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast in his might; let not a rich man boast in his riches,**

²⁴ **but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am Yahweh who shows lovingkindness, justice, and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things,” declares Yahweh.**

If the boasting in God **is an expression of faith** such as this, then it is **definitely an advantage to the Jew**.

Once more, though, the Jews **forfeited their advantages** by **hypocritically responding** to them with a lack of faithfulness.

Thus, the Jewish hypocrisy **hardened their hearts** and turned their boast in God into **an empty act of religious ritual**.

We see an example of this in **Micah 3:11**—

Her heads [Israel's rulers] pronounce judgment for a bribe, and her priests instruct for a price, and her prophets divine for money. Yet they lean on Yahweh saying, "Is not Yahweh in our midst? Evil will not come upon us."

Fourth, as **verse 18** begins, the Jew has the advantage of **"[know God's] will."**

Through the revelation of the Law, the Jews held the **undeniable advantage** of **knowing God's moral will**.

As Moses exhort the people of Israel in **Deuteronomy 4:8**—

What great nation is there that has statutes and judgments as righteous as this whole law which I am setting before you today?

So Israel received the **covenant advantage** of knowing the will of God through the **inspired revelation of God**, first in the Law of Moses and then as that same Law was further explained and applied through **the wisdom and prophetic books of the OT**.

Sadly, Israel **most often responded with disobedience** instead of heading the exhortation of Moses in just a few verses earlier in **[4:5-6]**—

⁵ **See, I have taught you statutes and judgments just as Yahweh my God commanded me, that you should do thus in the land where you are entering to possess it.**

⁶ **You shall keep and do them, for that is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.'**

Fifth and finally, as **verse 18** continues, the Jew has the advantage of “[**approving**] **the things that are essential.**”

There is some minor disagreement among commentators as to whether Paul is referring to approving things that are “**essential**” or things that are “**excellent.**”

The two options are describing Jews **discerning between either things that are important and unimportant, or things that are the best and things that are not the best.**

At the end of the day, there is so little between these options that there is not much to distinguish them.

Nevertheless, Paul does seem to be referring to the Jewish **approval of things that are excellent**—things that are **the best.**³

This seems very similar to what Paul prays for the church in **Philippians 1:9-10**—

⁹ **This I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in full knowledge and all discernment,**
¹⁰ **so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and without fault until the day of Christ**

This approval or discernment is clearly related to **knowing God's will**, and both are inseparably linked to **the Law as the source of this knowledge and discernment.**

³ Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, ed. Ned B. Stonehouse et al., Second Edition, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 170–171.

Paul gives a reason for both **the fourth and the fifth advantage** when he writes in **verse 18** that the Jews are have knowledge and discernment because they are “**instructed out of the Law.**”⁴

The Jews possessed many of these advantages because of the **covenant blessing of possessing the Law.**

The Law would indeed give them a knowledge of God’s will and the discernment to know the best way to live.

In this sense, Paul echoes the sentiment of **Psalms 119:98-100**
⁹⁸ **Your commandments make me wiser than my enemies, for they are mine forever.**

⁹⁹ **I have more insight than all my teachers, for Your testimonies are my meditation.**

¹⁰⁰ **I perceive more than the aged, because I have observed Your precepts.**

Now as we step back and consider these **five advantages** together, we see that the Jews enjoyed many advantages because they possessed the Law.

The problem is, as we have also seen, that these advantages **do not make anyone right with God** in themselves.

The Jews need to respond to these advantages with **faith in God and obedience to His Law**, or else these advantages are forfeit.

⁴ Stanley E. Porter and David I. Yoon, *Romans: A Handbook on the Greek Text*, ed. Lidija Novakovic, Baylor Handbook on the Greek New Testament (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2023), 51.

The first implication of possessing the Law is that there are **many advantages of the Law.**

Because of their hypocrisy, **the Jews forfeited these benefits.**

Nevertheless, they were real, **just like the advantages that we all have by possessing the Scriptures.**

Having a Bible and being well taught in the Bible offers incomparable advantages to you, **unless you forfeit them by being a hypocrite.**

You must respond to the advantages of having a Bible with **faith in God and obedience to His commands.**

Now, we've covered the advantages of the Law, but let's turn to the responsibilities as Paul covers them in **verses 19–20.**

2. RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LAW (19–20)

The list of five advantages is followed by **another list of four responsibilities** that the Jews, **as God's covenant people,** **have towards the Gentiles.**

These responsibilities are rooted in the **covenant expectation** that Abraham and his offspring **would be a blessing to all the nations,** as we see in **Genesis 12:2-3**—

² And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing;

³ **And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.**

The primary manner in which Israel was supposed to be a blessing to the nations was to be **the place they could go to hear and be instructed in God's Law.**

This plan is captured in the promise that God will still fulfil in the future, as we find the promise in **Micah 4:1-2**—

¹ **Now it will be that in the last days the mountain of the house of Yahweh will be established as the head of the mountains, and will be lifted up above the hills, and the peoples will stream to it.**

² **And many nations will come and say, “Come and let us go up to the mountain of Yahweh and to the house of the God of Jacob, that He may instruct us from His ways and that we may walk in His paths.” For from Zion will go forth the law, And the word of Yahweh from Jerusalem.**

Therefore, the Jews were convinced that God wanted them to have a **priestly ministry among the Gentiles**, teaching them God's Law.

This is the “**confidence**” that you see Paul referring to in **verse 19**.

Paul agreed that this was **certainly their responsibility** as the ones entrusted with the Law, but what he **questioned was whether the Jews had truly fulfilled their calling.**⁵

⁵ Schreiner, *Romans*, 139.

With that in mind, look at **verses 19–20**—

¹⁹ **and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness,**

²⁰ **a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of the immature, having in the Law the embodiment of knowledge and of the truth**

Paul **lists out four responsibilities** that **Jews had towards the Gentiles** as the **ones who possessed God's Law**.

First, as those entrusted with the Law, the Jews are responsible to be **guides to the blind**.

Second, they are responsible to be **lights to those in darkness**.

These two responsibilities **go together**, since they describe **virtually the same ministry** towards the Gentiles.

As a natural outcome of the Jews' knowledge of God through the Law, they are in a position to help others understand the truth about God.⁶

In **Isaiah 42:6-7**, we read of the **mission that Yahweh gave to His Servant**—

⁶ **“I am Yahweh, I have called You in righteousness; I will also take hold of You by the hand and guard You, and I will give You as a covenant to the people, as a light to the nations,**

⁷ **To open blind eyes...**

⁶ Douglas J. Moo, *Romans*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000), 93.

While this describes the **ministry of the Servant of the Lord**, whom we know to be Jesus Christ, Isaiah portrays Him as **fulfilling the corporate ministry of Israel** which the nation failed to fulfil.

Therefore, **the Jews were not wrong** in being convinced that God wanted them to **help others understand the truth about Him**.

In fact, **Jesus used very similar language** when he **commissioned Paul to the ministry of apostleship**.

In **Acts 26:18**, Paul recalls the words of Jesus as He sent him to the Gentiles, as Jesus said—

to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the authority of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.

So then, the Jews were correct that because God had **entrusted them with the possession of the Law** that He also gave them **the responsibility of teaching the Gentiles**.

Sadly, **the Jews failed miserably** in this responsibility as Jesus said in **Matthew 15:14**—

They are blind guides of the blind. And if a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit.

Because of their hypocrisy, the Jews couldn't guide the blind because they themselves were **blinded through unbelief and disobedience**.

Third, as those entrusted with the Law, the Jews are responsible to be **correctors of the foolish**.

Fourth, they are responsible to be **teachers of the immature**.

Once more, these two responsibilities **go together**, since they **describe the means** by which the Jews are supposed to carry out their ministry.

In this context, being a “**corrector**” and a “**teacher**” is virtually the same thing.

Paul describes the Gentiles, though, as “**foolish**” and “**immature**.”

The word “**foolish**” here is **not as stern** as the similar idea in the book of **Proverbs**, where it describes the person who **rebels against God’s standards and goes his or her own way**.

Here it refers to Gentiles as people who, **without detailed knowledge of God and His Word**, **inevitably fall into wrong forms of worship and behaviour**.⁷

In the same way, the **Jews viewed the Gentiles** as “**immature**” or even as “**infants**,” as we can translate this term, because they **had no religious sensibilities**.⁸

The Gentile immaturity **proves that they need** to be taught the true knowledge and will of God.

⁷ Moo, *Romans*, NIVAC, 93.

⁸ BDAG, νήπιος.

Once more, as he did with the advantages of possessing the Law, **Paul provides a reason** for the Jewish responsibilities.⁹

He says in **verse 20** that they should be correctors and teachers because they have **“the Law the embodiment of knowledge and of the truth.”**¹⁰

One commentator explains that Paul is describing *“knowledge and truth in a form which can be grasped, expressed clearly and understandably.”*¹¹

In simpler terms, Paul wrote in **verse 18** that Jews **know how to live life God’s way** because they were **instructed by the Law**.

Now in **verse 20**, he says they **should be able to teach others the same** because of **the sufficiency of Scripture**.

As we take another step back to consider the the **second implication** of possessing the Law, we can understand that **God gave the Jews a responsibility** towards those who did not receive the treasure they did.

We who have received an **even greater treasure** in the **completed canon of Scripture**, the whole Bible, have even **greater responsibilities** to teach others how to live life God’s way.

⁹ Schreiner, *Romans*, 140.

¹⁰ Cf. Porter and Yoon, *Romans*, 52.

¹¹ C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, International Critical Commentary (London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 167.

However, **you cannot teach others** to faithfully obey God **if you yourself do not.**

Hypocrisy will destroy your ability to teach others, and so it is all the more important that you **practice what you preach.**

Nevertheless, as with the Jews, **the most devastating consequence** of your hypocrisy is that you will demonstrate that you are **NOT a doer of the Law who is right with God.**

3. TRANSGRESSION OF THE LAW (21–22)

The Jews **failed because of their hypocrisy,** and in doing so **forfeited their advantages and failed in their responsibilities.**

That is the point Paul makes as he **charges the Jews** with **transgression of the Law.**

So the third implication of possessing the Law is that when the Jews disobeyed, they were guilty of **transgressing the Law.**

The hypocrisy of these unbelieving Jews demonstrated that while they may have known God's will, **they certainly did not practice His will.**

They may have had the Law, but **it was of no value to them** because they did not obey the Law and **thereby demonstrate the fruit of faith in God.**

As you look at **verses 21–22**, you'll see that Paul **asks four rhetorical questions** that were designed to **convict the hypocritical Jews**.

The first question is intended by Paul to be the **summary question**, and the next three serve as **specific examples**.

Let's read the verses before we consider the specifics of Paul's convicting questions—

21 you, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that one shall not steal, do you steal?

22 You who say that one should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?

As we noted, **the first question** stands as a **summary** and **serves to accuse the Jews of hypocrisy**.

When Paul writes, **“you [...] who teach another, do you not teach yourself?”**, he is **NOT objecting to Jews teaching others**.

After all, he has just established that **this is their calling and responsibility**.

What Paul is questioning, then, is **whether the Jews have violated the very Law they treasure and have taught to others**.

Simply put, Paul is stating that they are **guilty of hypocrisy** because **they do not practice what they preach**.

To give concrete evidence, Paul asks the **next three convicting questions**.

We shouldn't misunderstand Paul to be **suggesting that every Jew was guilty** of the hypocritical offences of stealing, committing adultery, and participating in pagan idolatry.

Rather, as **Tom Schreiner** puts it, "*Paul uses particularly blatant and shocking examples (like any good preacher) to illustrate the principle that Jews violated the law that they possessed.*"¹²

So then, Paul **doesn't mean that all Jews commit these sins**, but that these sins are **representative of the clear contradictions** that arise from the hypocrisy that characterises the unbelieving Jewish people.

After all, God repeatedly confronted Israel for **not practicing what they preached**, as he says in **Isaiah 29:13**—

“This people draw near with their mouth and honour Me with their lips, but they remove their hearts far from Me, and their fear of Me is in the command of men learned by rote.”

Most of us are aware that the **three specific accusations** that Paul makes are that Jews **violated the Ten Commandments, specifically numbers 1 and 2 (combined), 7 and 8**.

Obviously many Jews participated in **hypocritical theft and adultery**, thus demonstrating that **they did not obey** the Law they **put their misplaced confidence in**.

¹² Schreiner, *Romans*, 142.

The third question about robbing temples, though, does **require brief explanation**.

While the **most literal act of robbing pagan temples** of their idols was **probably rare among the Jews**, Paul is more likely referring to the command of **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, lest you be snared by it, for it is an abomination to Yahweh your God.

Contrary to the Law, the Jews of Paul's day were **relaxing the prohibition** against using precious metals melted down from idols.

As **one commentator** noted, "*Jewish merchants seem to have often felt free to 'handle' for purely commercial purposes such merchandise as came their way from heathen temples, whether directly or indirectly.*"¹³

So Paul is most probably **referring to this practice** as evidence that the Jews disobeyed the Law and **hypocritically participated in idolatry**, albeit indirectly.

Therefore, in **all three examples** of **theft, adultery, and idolatry**, the Jews **failed to practice what they preached**.

Thus, **the third implication** of possessing the Law is that by **failing to practice what they preached**, the Jews became **transgressors of the Law**.

¹³ Richard N. Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, ed. I. Howard Marshall and Donald A. Hagner, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016), 308.

Paul used his **four convicting questions** to show that they were **NOT true doers of the Law**.

Their confession and their conduct did not correspond, and therefore their **confidence in possessing the Law was misplaced**.

Only those who are **unhypocritical doers of the Law** will be **vindicated as right with God** in the final judgement.

That prepares us for the **fourth and final implication** which has to do with the **outcome of spiritual hypocrisy**.

4. CONDEMNATION OF THE LAW (23–24)

As you look at **verse 23**, **a quick comment about its form** is necessary.

The **Legacy Standard Bible** translates it as a **question**, following the **previous four**.

However, **the both the context and grammar** of the verse suggest that it is **better to understand it as a statement**.

Paul, then, **issues the verdict** after **proving Jewish hypocrisy**.

Or in the terms of the earlier analogy, **after diagnosing the disease** of hypocrisy, **Paul provides the prognosis**.

The fourth implication of possessing the Law is that **by hypocritically disobeying the Law**, the Jews would be **condemned by the very Law** they placed their confidence in.

Simply possessing the Law would not save them from God's judgement because the possession of the Law **meant they had no excuse**.

Look at verses 23–24 as **Paul concludes** that the Jews would be **condemned because of their hypocrisy**—

²³ **You who boast in the Law, through your transgression of the Law, do you dishonour God?**

²⁴ **For “THE NAME OF GOD IS BLASPHEMED AMONG THE GENTILES BECAUSE OF YOU,” just as it is written.**

Here we should understand the Jewish “**boasting**” to be **negative**, unlike their boast in God in **verse 17**.

This “**boast**” was Paul's shorthand way of **referring to the hypocritical and misplaced confidence** the Jews had that they would escape the judgement of God and be declared right with Him simply because they possessed the Law.

Jesus also confronted this **hypocritical boast in the Law**, as we see in **John 5:45** where He said—

Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father; the one who accuses you is Moses, in whom you have set your hope.

The clear implication from the context of Paul's argument is that the Jews are **condemned by their hypocrisy**.

As we saw last Sunday in our study of **verse 13**, Paul argued that—

It is not the hearers of the Law who are just before God, but the doers of the Law will be justified.

Failing to practice what they preached, the Jews stood condemned as hypocrites who were **hearers of the Law only and not righteous doers**.

As Paul says in **verse 24**, they were **hypocritical transgressors of the Law, not doers of the Law**.

However, Paul points to an **even greater result of Jewish hypocrisy—God is dishonoured**.

The ultimate reason why the Jews were given the Law was **so that their lives would bring honour and glory to God's name**.

However, by their transgression, **they dishonoured God's name** among the very Gentiles they were supposed to teach God's Law to so that they too would live to bring honour and glory to God's name.

Paul then adds **Scriptural proof and authority** to the verdict by quoting **Isaiah 52:5 in verse 24**—

For “THE NAME OF GOD IS BLASPHEMED AMONG THE GENTILES BECAUSE OF YOU,” just as it is written.

As Paul **explained the implications** of possessing the Law, it is clear that the Jews **forfeited the advantages** and **failed in the responsibilities** of the Law.

Furthermore, they were guilty of **the transgression of the Law** as hypocrites who did not practice what they preached.

Therefore, as Paul explained, the Jews were **condemned by the very Law** they had placed their confidence in.

CONCLUSION

As we conclude, we can see that **hypocrisy is like the spiritual plague** that hardens the human heart.

Hypocrisy is **damning to people** and **dishonouring to God**.

That is why God hates hypocrisy.

That is also why it is **essential that you practice what you preach**.

If you hope to be vindicated in the final judgement as one who is righteous through faith, then **you need to avoid hypocrisy**.

If your arteries are clogged up with the plague of hypocrisy then the final judgement will **reveal your hardened and unbelieving heart**, and you should **expect to be condemned by God**.

It is the **unhypocritical doers of the Law** who will be right with God, not the **hypocritical hearers of the Law**.

So avoid hypocrisy and practice what you preach so that you will be **vindicated in the future as right with God**.

BENEDICTION

*May the Lord of peace Himself,
grant you peace at all times, under all circumstances.
The Lord be with you all.
Amen.¹⁴*

¹⁴ Dale Ralph Davis, *Grace Be with You: Benedictions from Dale Ralph Davis*, New Edition (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2019), 16.

Romans 2:17–24 LSB

2:17	But if you	“Jew”							Condition of 21a
b	and	bear the name	rely	upon the Law					
c	and	rely	boast	in God,					
2:18	and	know	His will						
b	and	approve	← the things that are essential,						
c		← being instructed out of the Law ,							Reason for 18a–b
2:19	and	are confident that you yourself are	a guide	to the blind,					
b			a light	to those who are in darkness,					
2:20			a corrector	of the foolish,					Condition of 21a
b			a teacher	of the immature,					
c			← having in the Law the embodiment of knowledge and of the truth						Reason for 19–20b
2:21	you, therefore, who	teach another,							Summary rhetorical question
b	[1] You who	preach that one shall not steal,			do you not teach yourself?				
2:22	[2] You who	say that one should not commit adultery,			do you steal?				Specific rhetorical questions illustrating 21a
b	[3] You who	abhor idols,			do you commit adultery?				
2:23	You who	boast in the Law [...]			do you rob temples?				Rhetorical question asserting result
b	←	←			do you dishonor God?				Means of 23a
					← through your transgression of the Law				
2:24									Proof of 23a



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Sermon Notes

Introduction

As we study Paul's confrontation of Jewish hypocrisy in Romans 2:17–24, we'll find that he presses home the importance of practicing what you preach through four implications of possessing the Law.

1. Advantages of the Law (17–18)

2. Responsibilities of the Law (19–20)

3. Transgression of the Law (21–22)

4. Condemnation of the Law (23–24)

Conclusion