



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Romans 2: 17-29

Romans

"Unmasking Hypocrites"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] The blessing is in the Word of God and the Book of Romans certainly is that great work of the Holy Spirit through the apostle Paul, and we are continuing in that portion of the book where Paul is indicting the whole of the human race, and he is now directing his attention to the Jew, having condemned or convicted the Gentile. And we are in the second portion of that, verses 17 through 29 of chapter 2. That's our Scripture reading. Romans chapter 2, beginning with verse 17. Paul writes:

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

For indeed circumcision is of value if you practice the Law; but if you are a transgressor of the Law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. So if the uncircumcised man keeps the requirements of the Law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? And he who is physically uncircumcised, if he keeps the

Law, will he not judge you who though having the letter of the Law and circumcision are a transgressor of the Law? For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God.

May the Lord bless this reading of His word. Let's bow together in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank You for the time we have to come together and to read Your Scripture, and then consider its meaning in some depth. This book is a great gift to the world and a great gift to Your people. It convicts the world of its sin. It brings some in the world out of the world and into the church through the gospel that is proclaimed here. And through it, Your people learn about themselves and learn about You, and we are certainly exposed to our failures in this text, and I pray, Father, that as we consider it together, You would convict us and bring to our attention failures that need to be brought to our attention. And through that, bring us to a great appreciation of Your grace. Because apart from grace, Father, we are absolutely lost. But Your grace saves even the chief of sinners. And so we praise You for that. We praise You for what this book is about: the unfolding of Your grace, the salvation that comes by Your Son and is received by us through faith alone. So we praise You for that. We praise You for Your goodness to us and pray that You would teach us this morning. We have a great gift in the Word of God, but we're not left with the Word of God. We have the Spirit of God to teach us, to open our hearts to receive the instruction of the apostle, and we pray that that ministry would go unhindered this morning. Open our hearts to receive Your truth. Bless us in the things that we consider this morning, and help us to understand them and apply them to our hearts.

So bless us spiritually, but Father, we also look to You to bless in the material things of life. And we have needs in that area as well. We think of the sick, of those who have undergone surgeries. We pray that You'd bless them. The physical areas of life are often difficult and we are reminded through affliction of our dependence on You. We tend to forget that when we go through easy and pleasant times in life, those come from You. They're a gift from You, Father. The peace that we enjoy, the

pleasantries of life, they are a gift from You. But so are the afflictions of life. They cause us to realize our dependence upon You. They draw us close to You. They draw us close to the throne of grace. They cause us to look to You in time of need, to seek help, and so we thank You for afflicting us. We don't enjoy it. Wouldn't be affliction if we did, but we know by faith, that it's through affliction that You bless Your people. And so, through the difficult times that various individuals in our congregation are passing through, we pray that You'd bless them, and we pray that You'd bring them through them safely with blessed effects in their life. We pray that You would comfort those who are afflicted, and we pray that You'd give healing. We pray for those who are without employment, that You'd open doors of opportunity for them. We pray for Young people, that You protect them from the temptations and the evils of the world. And we pray for our students, that You'd bless them with diligence in their studies. And for those who are in the workforce who are employed in various ways. Give them enthusiasm in their work. Make all that we do be done to please You. We pray that we'd honor You in our lives, in our lives, in the way we live them publically and essentially, most importantly, fundamentally, in our private lives. As we live before You. Because, whether we realize it or not, Father, we live every day before Your eye. You look upon us in everything we do and everywhere we are. We live in the secret things of life, as before You and to Your glory. We do that, Father. We'll live lives that please You before the world.

Well, bless us to that end this morning as we study Your word and bless us as we sing Your hymns. We pray that this next hymn would instruct us well and that You'd prepare us for study together. And then, bless us this evening when we return to this place to celebrate the Lord's supper. We commit our time now to You. We pray these things in Christ' s name. Amen.

[Message] There are some sins that people can tolerate and forgive more easily than others, but it seems that there's one that no one can tolerate, and that is hypocrisy. It's an interesting word. It comes from the theatre, and it originally referred to an actor. It's composed of two Greek words, *hypo*, which means under, or from under, and *krites*, which means answer or judge. The Greek and Roman actors, as you may know, wore masks. They would speak their lines, or they would answer one another from under their mask. The actor would play roles, play them often with great

passion, anger, or joy, or love, but was inwardly unaffected. He felt no real passion at all. He was playing a part, which is what the hypocrite does. He or she speaks from behind a kind of mask. What we see or what we hear is not the real person. The hypocrite is an actor.

Now, there are all kinds of hypocrites. We find them in business, in politics, in romance. But the worst of all, the one held in the greatest reproach is the religious hypocrite. And in Romans 2, Paul is unmasking hypocrites. That is his indictment on the Jews. It is the second part of his argument that all mankind is guilty before God and in need of salvation. In chapter 1, he dealt with the Gentiles. He exposed their guilt of idolatry and moral and mental corruption. They are depraved. To which the Jew would have readily agreed.

But in chapter 2, the apostle turns to the Jew to say, you're really no better than the Gentiles, for you who judge practice the same things. Now, that's hypocrisy. So in condemning Gentiles, they condemn themselves. And Paul goes on to explain in verses 1 through 16 that the Jews' condemnation is just.

But hypocrisy is a charge that can be made against the Gentiles also. Jews did not have a corner on it. The church has its hypocrites as well. The Puritan, Stephen Charnock, had some insightful statements on the statement. He wrote, "It is a sad thing to be a Christian at a supper; heathens in our shops, and devils in our closets." A hypocrite may well be turned a religious atheist, an atheist masked with religion.

Well, Paul looks under the masks of some religious hypocrites. He opens their closets in verses 17 through 29. And he does this with a series of probing questions to expose the Jews' failures, first in regard to the commandments of the law, and then in regard to the ceremonies of the law. They didn't keep the commandments that they knew and taught. They didn't live up to the meaning of circumcision on which they prided themselves, nor did they really understand the significance of it at all.

These failures that Paul will develop are seen clearly in the light of the advantages and the privileges that the Jews had. And they had many privileges, which only heightened their guilt. Paul begins with a catalog of them in verses 17 through 20 citing, first of all, the good name that they had, the name "Jew," which recalls all of the blessings, all of the advantages that they had. They were God's chosen people. The name "Jew" would recall that great blessing of God's choice of them out of all of the nations of the earth. He had made a covenant with them, made

it with Abraham, made a covenant with them at Sinai. They had a special relationship with Him and were blessed above all the people on the earth. As His covenant people, He gave them the law, gave them special revelation. They had been instructed out of the law, and so they knew the will of God. No other nation on earth had that advantage. As a result, they could approve the things that are excellent, Paul says. They knew right from wrong. The Gentiles, in contrast, lived in darkness.

Now, they had conscience of course. They were not without law altogether. God had written His law, so to speak, on their hearts in that the very fact that we are created in God's image wrecked in ruin though it is, we still have a sense of right and wrong, and they had that. They have conscience. But a person's conscience can be quieted. It can be seared by sin and become callous, and that is what happens. But the Word of God stands clear.

So they had real advantages, the Jewish people, and those advantages carried with them great privileges. Blessings are to be shared. They're not to be kept to oneself, and the Jews had the privilege of teaching the law to others. They were to be a light to the nations. And they took the law and its teachings to the nations. Paul writes in verses 19 and 20 that they were confident about themselves to be a guide to the blind and a light to those who are in darkness. That is a reference to the Gentiles, those who are blind and who are in darkness. And the Jews, they went to the Gentiles. They went to those in darkness. They went out on missionary journeys, engaged in missionary activity. They made proselytes among the Gentiles. Our Lord refers to that in Matthew 23 where He is addressing the Pharisees and calling them hypocrites. But He says in verse 15, "You travel around on sea and land to make one convert."

The first century before the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70 was a remarkable period of missionary zeal among Jews, and one of great success. We see that in the books of the New Testament, the gospels, and the Book of Acts. We read of the proselytes, the God fear is there, because the Gentiles, many of them had come to a point where they recognized the emptiness, the vanity of their religions and their philosophies, that they were bankrupt, and many of them turned to the light of Judaism, and were converted and become proselytes. We see them in the gospels. We see them in the Book of Acts. Great missionary activity took place.

But did the Jews live up to what they taught? They knew the law. They taught it. But did they live up to it? That is the question that Paul raises in verses 21 through 23. His argument here in these verses has a conditional construction to it. If these things are true, if these advantages are real, if you bear the name Jew and rely upon the law, if you are a teacher of the immature, then how is it that you do not practice these things? That's the charge. Not living up to their knowledge. Not living consistently with it, which Paul now puts in a series of questions related to the law. Three laws in particular. Prohibitions on stealing, a prohibition on adultery, and thirdly, idolatry. You teach people not to steal? He asks. Do you steal? You say don't commit adultery. Do you commit adultery?

In other words, do you practice what you preach? There is evidence from rabbinical writings of the time that the Jewish teachers were known to live in contradiction to the law. They were criticized, in fact, by other rabbis for doing that. Charles Cranfield, who's written an important commentary on the Book of Romans gives some citations of that, quotes one case in which a rabbi, an individual who was known to teach the law and teach his congregation or his students against stealing is said to be one who stole. Other commentators have quoted a famous rabbi who was a contemporary of Paul, Rabbi Johanan ben Zakai who is famous because he was, it is said, during the Siege of Jerusalem, smuggled out of the city in a coffin, and he went on to establish a school after the destruction of Jerusalem, which is credited with reestablishing Judaism as it is now known, a religion without the temple, without sacrifice. But he lamented the state of Jewish morality in his day and he wrote of the increase of murder, adultery, sexual vice, commercial and judicial corruption, bitter sectarian strife, and other evils.

So, moral conditions were rather deplorable. Now, that's not to say that all Jews were guilty of those vices, of course. Many lived moral lives, at least lived moral lives before men. But still, no one keeps the law perfectly. So, the Jews were guilty of not living up to their light, not living up to the knowledge that God had given them.

Now, we could leave the lesson in the historical context of Paul's indictment on the Jews for hypocrisy and be relatively unthreatened by what we're studying. But can't we ask the same questions that Paul is asking here of others. Can't we ask those questions of ourselves? Basically, Paul is addressing religious people, or as someone

has put it, his charge is against the orthodox. It's against those who know truth, and who believe that they're right with God.

So, what about the Roman Catholic who goes to Mass as faithfully as the Jew went to synagogue? What about the protestant who goes to church and hears the Bible taught? What about ourselves? Maybe we should allow Paul's questions to search our own souls. Do we steal?

Well, we may not steal in the sense of entering our neighbor's house and leaving with one of his possessions. But as James Boyce put it, we steal from God when we fail to worship Him as we ought, or when we set our concerns ahead of His. We steal from an employer when we do not give the best work of which we are capable, or when we overextend our coffee breaks, or leave work early. We steal if we waste company products or use company time for personal matters. In other words, there are lots of ways to steal without really realizing that we are doing it, without thinking that we're stealing at all. Do we commit adultery? Well, we think about that and think about the charge that Paul has brought against these teachers of the law, and we might think of the scandals of the televangelists back in the 1980s, false teachers who betrayed themselves by their secret lives. Adultery, fornication, pornography are major problems in our society and sins that are not only excused, not only tolerated. Some of those sins that I referred to at the beginning, the sins are actually promoted in the media. And because the church has become very much like the world, those sins have found their way into the church, into evangelical churches.

Now, you may be a faithful spouse, faithful to your husband, faithful to your wife. You may be a moral young person. But what do you like to watch? What do you like to read? What do you listen to? The Lord explained in the Sermon on the Mount that a sin of the heart was tantamount to the deed itself. Lust equals adultery. Anger equals murder. Coveting equals theft. Paul's charge of hypocrisy here is against the Jew. We won't forget that. That is the point that he is making. He's bringing his indictment against the Jew. He's indicted the Gentile; now he's indicting the Jew. But those who name the name of Christ must examine their own hearts.

What do we do in the secret place of our thoughts? The third violation that Paul cites has to do with the first two commandments of the Decalogue, that of idolatry. He writes: "You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?" The Jews certainly did abhor idols and there are various examples out of history that we could cite to

prove that. Josephus recounts one example when Pilate became governor. He set up Roman standards in Jerusalem bearing the images of the emperor, and the Jews were outraged by that. They, en masse, came before Pilate to protest. And Pilate's response, which was typical of him being a violent man, surrounded them with Roman soldiers who drew their swords, and the response of the Jews was not to back down at all. In fact, they bared their necks to the Roman swords and dared them to put them to death. They would rather die than permit a form of idolatry in the city of Jerusalem.

They abhorred idols and were confident in their purity from idolatry. But Paul asks, if that's so, why do you rob temples? That's a question that's been given different interpretation, this idea of robbing temples. It may simply mean "commit sacrilege." Greek lexicons do give that as a meaning. In which case, it might mean that they robbed God of His honor, the honor that was due to Him, and they did that in ways like setting up a marketplace in the courtyard of the temple. But the fact that the other sins on this list, stealing and adultery, are literal, would indicate that this too is to be taken literally, that Jews actually profited from the robbery of pagan temples. That was a crime that was committed in those days.

In Acts 19 and verse 37, the town clerk of Ephesus defended Paul and his friends against the charge. They are, he said, neither robbers of temples, nor blasphemers of our goddess. So, Paul's point here is that the Jews' rejection of idolatry was not as complete as he might think. When it came to bowing before an idol, the Jew did not do that. It was an abomination to him. But when it came to making some money off idolatry, well, he could find a way to do that. So, he was not as completely separated from it as he might think.

But again, are we? The last verse of 1 John is interesting. He concludes that book by saying, "Little children, guard yourselves from idols." Evidently, Christians had a problem with idols as well. And the fact is: we all do. If we put anything before Christ, we have a problem with idols. What has the greatest importance in your life? What do you focus on most during the day? What is your greatest concern? What do you pour your energy into? Work? Education? Family? All those are good things. Do you put them before Christ? Before the Lord God? What about self? That's the greatest idol of all, and we carry it around in our hearts. We polish it every day. We stroke our egos. It's not a little idol. It is large and it is

destructive. We have a word in our vocabulary: juggernaut. It is a word that means a "heavy moving force." It can't be stopped. It's a word that comes out of India, and it refers to an idol that was carried or is carried on a great tower with huge wheels. And as it rolls along, it sometimes crushes people underneath.

That's what the idol of self is like. It is something that's large. It's not small. It is big and it crushes people underneath, people who get in our way, and who deny us what we want. We don't have to bow the knee to Baal or Jupiter to be an idolater. Christians have their idols. We carry them with us in our hearts, with our love of the world and our love of ourselves. And, why do we do that? Why do we have such a great concern for ourselves and for this world in which we live? Is it because we think that we can gain happiness in the world from the world? That is absolutely impossible. It cannot be done. We're not made in that way. That does not fit with reality. Solomon called that: striving after the wind, and Solomon had exhausted all the avenues of finding pleasure in this world. He realized it can't be done. You try to find happiness, fulfillment in this world, you are striving after the wind. It is vanity. It is futility. Augustin was right when he wrote that famous prayer at the beginning of his confessions: "You have made us for Yourself and our heart is restless until it finds rest in You."

Why is that? Because there is only one God. We may have idols. We may have little gods, but there is only one God. Only He can satisfy. Only He can give rest and peace and joy. For the Christian to try to find that in the world, anywhere else, is idolatry, and idolatry in the Christian heart is hypocrisy.

And the world recognizes that. Selfishness and worldliness are not Christian, and the world is not attracted to the gospel in a worldly church, or a proud church. In fact, hypocrisy in the church provokes blasphemy from the world. That was the consequence of Jewish hypocrisy. That's what Paul states in verses 23 and 24. They dishonor God and the Gentiles blaspheme. For "The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you." That is a combination of quotes from Isaiah 52:5 and Ezekiel 36:22. In both texts, God is mocked because His people have been defeated, and they have been enslaved. The Babylonians held them. To the Gentiles, that was a proof that God couldn't defend His people. The fact that God's people had been defeated showed that God was weak, and they believed that their gods had triumphed over the Jewish God, and therefore, the Jewish God was nothing to be

respected. In fact, they did not respect Him. They despised Him along with all of the other gods of the peoples that they had subjugated and defeated.

Well, moral defeat discredits the name of God the same as military defeat did. It indicates to the Gentile that this God is weak. This God is no God at all. The Jews, well, they had set themselves up as judges of the Gentiles and as guides to the blind, as teachers of truth and righteousness. And then they go and contradict all of that, which makes a mockery of everything that they taught, everything that they stood for. It brings reproach upon the name of God. And so the Gentiles blasphemed. They rejected the God of the Bible.

The Jews failed to keep the law in which they boasted, and they also failed to live up to the circumcision in which they felt secure. That is what Paul addresses in the remaining verses. Robert Haldane wrote: "Paul here pursues the Jew into his last retreat." The Jews had great confidence in circumcision. They considered it, as one writer put it, "a certain passport to salvation." It was their ticket to heaven. The rabbinic statements of that era reflect their confidence in the saving power of circumcision. They wrote, for example, "Circumcised men do not descend into Gehenna." And, "Circumcision will deliver Israel from Gehenna." They believe that Abraham sits at the entrance of hell and will not let any circumcised man of Israel go down into it.

So, the Jewish response to Paul's argument so far would be: well, perhaps Paul, you're right in what you've said. Perhaps we haven't lived up to our knowledge and we haven't kept the law perfectly. We're not perfect people. So what? We're circumcised. We have the sign of the covenant. Paul's response to that is to challenge that self-confident, that complacent attitude by explaining that circumcision is only a sign. It doesn't make a person safe. It doesn't save. There's no saving power in the rite of circumcision.

Now, he doesn't deny the value of circumcision. In fact, he begins by stating its value. But with an important qualification: "Indeed, circumcision is of value if you practice the Law; but if you are a transgressor of the Law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision." In other words, if you don't keep the law, circumcision has no value because there is no value behind it. There's no reality in your life. Paul's not suggesting that a person can keep the law perfectly and that circumcision is of saving value for the person who does that. Circumcision was a sign of the covenant that God

made with Abraham which was a relationship based on grace alone. And Abraham received the blessings of that covenant through faith alone. Abraham was blessed by God, justified by God, saved by God long before the law was given, long before circumcision was given. He was declared a righteous man through his faith in Genesis 15. It's not until Genesis 17 that God gives him circumcision. Circumcision was the sign of the covenant that God made with Abraham and Abraham's descendants were to be circumcised as a reminder of the grace and faith of that covenant.

So, if a person has circumcision but doesn't have the faith that joins a person to the blessings of that covenant, of that relationship, or the obedience of faith, the obedience that flows from a life of faith, then circumcision is meaningless. On the other hand, Paul says, if the uncircumcised man keeps the requirements of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? Now, he's referring here to the Gentile Christian who does not have circumcision, who's an uncircumcised man, but does what circumcision pointed to. He believed God's word. He believed the gospel as Abraham had done, and he lives obediently. He lives according to the principles of God's word. As a result, Paul explains, the Gentile who was rejected, judged by the Jew, by his example, will condemn the Jew.

John Stott puts it this way: circumcision minus obedience equals uncircumcision, while uncircumcision plus obedience equals circumcision. It's not the man who is circumcised who enjoys the blessings of the covenant of God, the covenant that He made with Abraham and the promise of salvation that is a part of that covenant. It's the person who obeys the requirements of the covenant. It's the person who believes that has those blessings. The Jew seems to have forgotten that verse that's tucked away in 1 Samuel 16 where God said: "Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." And the heart, the inward part, has always been the issue. All the way back to the beginning. Moses stressed that in the last sermons that he gave to the nation. That's what the Deuteronomy is. It's a collection of his last sermons just before he died, just before the nation crossed over Jordan into the promised land. And in Deuteronomy chapter 10 verse 16, he told the people: "Circumcise your heart and stiffen your neck no longer." That's the meaning of circumcision. It is circumcision of the heart. That's the reality. Jeremiah had the

same message. "Circumcise yourselves to the Lord and remove the foreskins of your heart."

The issue is not: has the flesh been cut? But, is the heart right? That's Paul's point. That is what he explains in verses 28 and 29, that a true Jew is not one outwardly, but inwardly. Circumcision is not in the flesh; it's of the heart. The cutting of the flesh represents a spiritual reality. It pictures what God's grace does for the sinner, by creating a new person, separated from the old person, the old life, separated from the flesh. It's a symbol of that. It's a picture of that. We can illustrate the significance of circumcision in this way: when you go to the doctor's office and you sit down, you usually have to wait for a little while he's seeing his other patients. And what do you do? Well, you may read a magazine. But inevitably, you'll look at the wall, you'll see what he's got on his walls, and what do you see there? Diplomas. Certificates that he or she graduated from university, from medical school, that he completed his residency at a certain hospital. And those documents don't make him or her a doctor. They are the sign or the seal, or the certificate that he or she is a doctor. A person can buy a diploma through the mail. It won't make the person a true doctor. And a person can complete all of the studies and the requirements of medicine, misplace the diplomas, or simply not put them on the wall, and still be a doctor.

It's the same with circumcision. It is a sacrament which is a seal or a sign of a spiritual reality. It's not the reality. It's a picture, a seal, a sign of the reality, and it doesn't make the reality. It is a witness to it. So, for the Jew, to be a true Jew, a real Jew, a name in which he took great pride because of all of the associations with that name. But to be a true Jew, he must be one inwardly, as well as outwardly. That's Paul's meaning in verse 29 where he writes, "He is a Jew who is one inwardly." Now, he doesn't mean by that that uncircumcised Gentile Christians are Jews, spiritually. The New Testament does not equate believing Gentiles with believing Jews. We are equal with one another. We have the same privileges. We are united in the one body of Christ. Paul teaches that in Galatians 3 verses 26 through 28. He teaches that in Ephesians chapters 2 and 3.

But Gentiles are not Jews. Paul is here using the same kind of language he'll use later on in chapter 9 and verse 6 where he states: they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel. Now, the context there is ethnic Israel, the Jewish people.

He's explaining in chapters 9, 10, and 11 what has happened to Israel and what is Israel's future. And the point that he's making there is: outwardly, they are Israelites, ethnically; but not inwardly. The true Israelite is the elect Israelite, the believing Jew, what Jewish Christians today mean when they call themselves completed Jews. That's Paul's idea here.

Now again, we might like to leave this to the historical context of hypocrisy among the Jews, but the application is broader than that. In principle, it's for the church also. We no longer practice circumcision. That is not a requirement. The church has other ordinances, those of baptism and the Lord's supper. Like circumcision, they are outward signs. Baptism pictures our entrance into salvation and the new life due to Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. The Lord's supper signifies our ongoing participation in that life, that every moment, we are sustained by Christ due to His sacrifice for us. The person who obeys the ordinances testifies that he or she has appropriated Christ, that in baptism, we have believed in Him, and through faith, we are identified with Him in His death, His burial, and His resurrection. And in the Lord's supper, we testify that Christ is the source of God's continual work of grace in us, that through Him, we are justified once and for all, that through Him, we are continually, daily being sanctified, and through Him, we shall be glorified.

Both of those ordinances or rites are signs. They point to a reality. They are a testimony of what Christ has accomplished and what Christ is doing. And they point to the faith and salvation that we have, the changed life that we have. They witness to all of that. But if there is no faith, then there is no salvation, there is no changed life, and the rite is just a ritual. And it has no significance at all, no more than a fruit label has on an empty can. So what Paul writes here about circumcision and being a Jew is true in principle of baptism, the Lord's supper, and being a Christian. The real Christian, like the real Jew, is one inwardly. True baptism, like true circumcision, is spiritual. It is of the heart. The spiritual doesn't replace the physical, and we shouldn't conclude from this that therefore we don't need water baptism and we don't need to take the Lord's supper. The Lord has commanded all of that. We need to be baptized; we need to take the Lord's supper. They are testimonies to others about our faith. They are a witness to ourselves, about our faith and about the reality of what Christ is presently doing. They give great encouragement as we take them, and as we

do that, as we take the Lord's supper, and we're reminded each Sunday evening that the Lord God sustains us. Christ is sustaining us at every moment, and it reminds us we're totally dependent on Him.

So we need those ordinances, and we need to be obedient to them. But, they do not save. And the person who comes to church, sits in the pew Sunday after Sunday singing hymns, even difficult hymns like the one we sang this morning but gives a good effort at it. Even that person who sits there with his Bible open or her Bible open, listening to the word taught, bowing his or her prayer, and yet there's all of that without genuine faith in Jesus Christ is no true Christian. He or she may be religious, but that's just a mask of religion. There's no life. There's no reality behind it. Only death. It is the tendency of human nature to think that we have real religion when we have the externals like a building with a steeple, or ministers or priests with robes and collars, or ceremonies with incense and bells.

God doesn't care about those things. It is the heart that He sees, and He does see it. He sees behind the mask, and someday He will unmask everyone. In that great day, men will stand before Him, religious men, the orthodox, those who have a knowledge of the truth, those who ministered the Word of God, and they will say: Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name and perform many miracles? And Christ will say to them: I never knew you; depart from Me.

That day will come. That's a day for all mankind. So in that day, what will He say to you? When the Lord Jesus Christ looks at you with those flaming eyes, what will He see? He'll see through you. Will He see a heart that's right with Him, that's pure, that's been circumcised? Or will He see a mask? Well, He sees behind it. So what will He see? Are you here being religious? Well, without faith in Christ, faith in Christ is what you need. That is Paul's point in this portion of the book. All people need faith in Christ, because we can't save ourselves. We are all wrecked in ruin by sin. We can't save ourselves. Our ceremonies can't save us. Nothing can save us but the sovereign grace of God.

We may take pride in calling ourselves by certain names, by certain identifications, by being protestant or calling ourselves reformed, or Calvinistic. That won't help us if we lack faith in Christ. John Calvin didn't die for your sins. Martin Luther didn't die for your sins. John Wesley didn't die for your sins. Jesus Christ died for sinners and only faith in Him saves sinners from the wrath to come. And all of

those names that we might accumulate, all of that boasting we might have and who are, in our theology, will only condemn us because if we don't accept the truth of it and believe it, it witnesses against us.

Well, as I say, we're saved only by God's grace only because of the work of Christ on the cross where He paid the penalty for sin and by the application of that work by the Holy Spirit which produces faith. So if you're here without Christ, have faith. Believe in the one who died for sinners and underwent the judgment for us so that we would escape it. Look to the Savior. Circumcise your heart. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved. And you who have done that, rejoice in the grace of God that has made you a new creature, that circumcised your heart for you, and is giving you eternal life. Let's pray.

[Prayer] We thank You, Father, for grace, for Your sovereign grace. Salvation is of the Lord. It's certainly not of us. Left to ourselves, we'd build fine religions, but they'd be religions without life. They'd be facades, monuments to our own efforts and our own boasting, without any credit to You. That's an abomination to You. That's an idol, Father. There is nothing that we can do, nothing that we can offer You that is worthy. We can only receive humbly the gift of life that's in Your Son, the work of Christ on our behalf. We thank You for Him. May our lives not be lived in contradiction to Your truth. Father, we are all prone to hypocrisy. We are hypocrites. We confess that. By Your grace, change us. Sanctify us. Make us increasingly consistent with Your truth.