

“Reality Over Ritual”
Romans 2:25-29

Introduction:

1. **IE:** I Can Still Remember The Day - When I Applied For My Very First Passport! I Was Planning To Visit Scotland On A Mission Trip During A Summer Break When I Was In College - And I Was Excited! I Was Even More Excited - When I Finally Got The Passport In The Mail! It Meant That I Was Able To Go!
 - Not Only That - It Meant That I Could Now Travel Anywhere In The World - As An American!
 - The Official Statement In The Passport Was Impressive To Me! It Said - “The Secretary Of State Of The United States Of America Hereby Requests All Whom It May Concern To Permit The Citizen Of The United States Named Herein To Pass Without Delay Or Hindrance And In Case Of Need To Give All Lawful Aid And Protection!”
 - Whenever I Carry My Little Blue Passport:
 - It Identifies Me As A Citizen Of The United States!
 - And So - Whenever I Travel - I Consider My Passport To Be One Of My Most Prized & Privileged Possessions!
2. Well - As We Will See In Our Bibles This Morning:
 - The Jewish People:
 - Were Also Given A Passport!
 - And - Like My Own - Their Passport Identified Them To The World:
 - As God’s Chosen & Special People!
 - And - Like Me - They Took Great Pride:
 - In Their Passport!
 - But - It Was A Passport Of Different Kind!
 - It Was Given To All Jewish Males:
 - Just Eight Days After They Were Born!
 - Their Passport:
 - Was The Procedure Of:
 - Circumcision!
 - 3. And This Is What The Apostle Paul:
 - Deals With In The Verses We Come To Next:
 - In Romans 2!
 - So - Please Have Your Bibles Opened There With Me - Romans 2!
 - Where - Paul:
 - Has Been Informing All Of Us - That:
 - Apart From God’s Grace & The Gospel:
 - We All Deserve The Wrath Of God:
 - Based On Judgment Of God:
 - For Our Sin!
 - And - This Applies To Every Person:
 - In Every Country:
 - Whether You Are A Jew Or A Gentile!
 - Because - God Is - As We’ve Already Seen In Romans:
 - An Impartial Judge Who Will Render Impartial Justice:
 - To Us All!
 - Even As We Learned From:
 - 2:11 - “For there is no respect of persons with God!”
 - 4. In Fact - We’ve Already Seen That:
 - Just The Possession Of Divine Truth:
 - Is Not Enough:
 - To Avoid God’s Judgment & Wrath:
 - No Matter Who You Are & No Matter Where You Live!
 - Because Every Person Has Received At Least **Some** Light About God!
 - **And** - Every Person:
 - Will Be Held Responsible For What They Have Done:
 - With That Truth!
 - We’ve Also Seen That:
 - Just The Privilege Of Divine Revelation:

- Is Not Enough:
 - To Avoid God's Judgment & Wrath!
 - This Especially Applies To The Jews - Who Were Given An Abundance Of God's Revelation - Through His Word & Through His Law!
 - Well - This Morning - We Are Going To See That - Even What The Jews Thought Was:
 - The Proof Of Divine Favor:
 - Was **Still** Not Enough:
 - To Avoid God's Judgment & Wrath!
 - Which Is What The Jews Considered Circumcision To Be In Paul's Day!
 - The Proof Of God's Favor & Even Their Passport To Heaven!
5. They Sincerely Believed & Taught That:
- It Was "Circumcision [That] Saves From Hell!"
 - But - As We Will Find Out In:
 - 2:25-29 - Circumcision Was **Not** Given:
 - As A Proof Of God's Favor!
 - And - Neither Circumcision:
 - Nor Any Other Kind Of Ritual:
 - Is A Passport - For Anyone - Into Heaven!
 - Let's Look At Those Verses Together:
 - 2:25-29 - "For circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the law: but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision. / Therefore if the uncircumcision keep the righteousness of the law, shall not his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision? / And shall not uncircumcision which is by nature, if it fulfil the law, judge thee, who by the letter and circumcision dost transgress the law? / For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: / But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God!"
6. In These Verses:
- Paul Explains To Us:
 - Who A "True Jew" Is!
 - And To Begin - He Points Out:
1. ***The Impotence Of An Outward Ritual!***
- In 2:25-26 - He Singles Out The Jewish Ritual Of Circumcision As Having Absolutely No Power:
 - To Save A Soul:
 - Or Even To Change A Heart!
 - And This Was Necessary:
 - Because - The Jews Really Did Believe:
 - That Circumcision Was Their Passport To Heaven!
 - **IE:** One Jewish Tradition States That Abraham Himself Stands At The Gates Of Hell - To Make Sure That Anyone Who Is Circumcised Does Not Go There!
 - But - Even Though There Is No Power:
 - In Circumcision - Paul Does Not Deny:
 - That There Can Still Be Some:
 - Profit To Rituals – Like Circumcision!
 - Which He States In:
 - 2:25a - "For Circumcision Verily Profiteth!"
 - That Is - There Is Some Use & Value To This Religious Ritual - Because:
 - Circumcision Was Given By God To His People As A Sign To Them! It Was:
 - A Sign Of Their Significance To The Lord!
 - Because They Were **Still Special** To Him:
 - As The "Children Of The Promise" Which God Gave To Abraham!
 - The Promise That He Made:
 - In Genesis 22:17-28 - "That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; / And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed!"
 - It Was Also:

- A Sign Of Their Security From The Lord!
 - Based On God's Own Pledge To Them:
 - Genesis 12:3 - "And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee!"
 - And God Kept His Pledge To His People:
 - Over & Over Again:
 - By Protecting Them & Providing For Them!
 - Circumcision Was Also:
- A Sign Of Their Separation To The Lord!
 - It Was To Be Done To Show:
 - That There Was A Difference:
 - Between The People Of God & The People Of The World!
- So - The Sign Of Circumcision:
 - Could Be Useful & Profitable To The Jew:
 - If - They Used It The Right Way!
 - To Remind Themselves:
 - Of All Their Privileges From God! And:
 - To Motivate Them:
 - In Their Duties To God!
 - But - Circumcision Was *Never* Meant To Be:
 - A ***Sign Of Their Salvation:***
 - From The Lord!
- It Was Impotent & Useless:
 - To Do Anything To Their Hearts!
 - And That Leads Us To See That There Is A:
- Problem With Rituals – Like Circumcision!
 - Which We Find In The Rest Of:
 - 2:25 - "For circumcision verily profiteth, *if* thou keep the law: but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision!"
 - Paul Is Telling Us Here:
 - That - If You Do Not Practice A Religious Ritual:
 - According To Its Purpose:
 - Then - It Is Pointless!
 - **IE:** It's Kind Of Like A Grand-Child Who Receives An Inheritance From A Grand-Parent! And The Stated Purpose Is For The Money To Be Used For College & To Prepare For Their Future! I Worked With Several Young People Like This! And - On More Than One Occasion - They Took The Money And Blew It & Betrayed The Purpose For Which It Was Given!
 - In A Sense - Circumcision Was An Inheritance Passed Down From Generation To Generation! It Was A Special Sign & Seal To Remind Them Of God's Special Covenant With Them!
 - But What Did They Do With Their Inheritance? They Blew It & Betrayed The Very Purpose God Had For It!
 - But - What Paul Tells Us About:
 - The Ritual Of Circumcision:
 - Can Be Applied To Any Religious Ritual, Even Our Own!
 - God Has Blessed Us, As His Church, With Some Rituals & Ordinances!
 - Like Baptism & The Lord's Supper!
 - But - Like The Jews - If We Do Not Practice Them According To Their Purpose:
 - They Become Pointless!
 - They Must Never Become:
 - Just Another Outward Ritual!
 - Because - They Are Powerless In And Of Themselves! They Must Be "Mixed With Faith!"
 - But - What About Other Rituals Or Traditions:
 - That Even Christians Think Will Make:
 - Our Country - On Better Terms:
 - With God?
 - When We Think That - For God To Bless Us:
 - We Need To Keep Prayer In Schools!
 - But - Whose Prayers Does The Lord Promise To Hear? The Prayers Of His

Own People!

- Or - Do We Think That - For God To Bless Us:
 - We Need To Keep The Ten Commandments In The Courthouse - Or The Motto - "In God We Trust" - On Our Dollar Bills?
- Remember: If You Or Any Other Person:
 - "Regards Iniquity In Their Heart, The Lord Will Not Hear" - Their Prayer! (Psalm 66:18)
 - Or - What Good Does It Do - If You Have The Ten Commandments, But Don't Keep Them?
 - Or - What Difference Does It Make For Your Money To **Say** "In God We Trust" - When It's In the Money Itself You Place Your Trust - And Not In God?
- These Good Things:
 - Can Easily Become Mere Rituals:
 - That Are As Pointless & Meaningless To Us - Even As Circumcision Is To An Unbelieving & A Disobedient Jew!
- And We See This Also In 2:26:
 - When Paul Adds:
 - "Therefore if the uncircumcision keep the righteousness of the law, shall not his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision?"
 - Of Course - Paul Has Already Proven To Us That:
 - The Gentiles - Or The Uncircumcision In This Verse - **Have Not & Can-Not** Keep The "Righteousness Of The Law" Any More Than The Jews!
 - But - **If They Could & If They Did:**
 - Paul Asks - Isn't That What God Was After In The First Place?
 - Only Those Who Do The **Behavior** Of Righteousness:
 - Can Expect To Receive The **Blessings** Of Righteousness!
- And That Is Why:
 - Outward Ritual Is:
 - Both Powerless & Pointless!
 - You Would Be Better Off:
 - If You Didn't Do The Ritual In The First Place!
 - Because - Paul Reminds Us Once Again - In 2:27 - That There Is A Judgment Coming!
 - And No Ritual Will Be Enough To Clear You From Your Sins Against The Lord & His Law!
 - 2:27 - "And shall not uncircumcision which is by nature, if it fulfil the law, judge / condemn thee, who by the letter and circumcision dost transgress the law?"
 - So - There Is An Absolute:
 - Impotence Of Outward Rituals!
 - They Are Powerless & They Are Pointless! But Then We See:

2. **The Importance Of An Inward Reality!**

- In The Last Two Verses Of Romans 2:
 - Which Is Paul's Conclusion:
 - Of What Makes A "True Jew!"
 - 2:28-29 - "For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: / But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God!"
 - These Are Verses We Need To Take To Heart:
 - Because Of What We Find Later:
 - In 9:6 - "For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel!"
 - You See - The Claim Of The Jew:
 - Was That They Alone Were The Children Of The Promise - And That They Alone:
 - Had A "Passport To Heaven!"
 - But What Makes You:
 - A Real Child Of God?
 - And - A Real Citizen Of God's Kingdom?
 - What Makes A Person A "True Jew?"
 - It Is **Not** Based On:
 - An Outward Ritual!

- It Is **Not** Based On:

- The Practices!
 - Which We Just Read About In 2:28!
 - Even If You Practice Judaism:
 - **Openly** - It's Not Enough!
 - It's Not What Matters To The Lord!
 - Think Of All The Customs & Ceremonies:
 - That The Jews Were Involved In!
 - Think Of All They Relied Upon:
 - As The Proof & Evidence That They Were On Good Terms With God!
 - **IE**: Even Their Ancestry / Family Tree - Which Is Interesting For A Lot Of People - But For Them - Their Eternal Destiny Depended On Their Connection And Relationship With Abraham!
 - But - What Does The Bible Say?
 - **"He Is Not A Jew!"** (2:28)
 - Why? As The Lord Told Samuel In 1 Samuel 16:7 - "For the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart!" - But:
 - Even If You Practice Judaism:
 - **Outwardly** - In The Flesh:
 - Through Circumcision:
 - It's **Still** Not Enough!
 - It's **Still** Not What Matters To The Lord!
 - **IE**: Because *External Features Do Not Always Correspond To Inward Reality!* I Come From A Family Full Of Red-Heads! My Father / My Brother / My Sister / And Quite A Few Of Their Children / But Not Me! When I Was Younger, They Would Even Tease Me That I Was Adopted! But - In Reality - My Birth Certificate Reads The Same As Theirs! I *Am* Part Of The Family! *External Features Do Not Always Correspond To Inward Reality!*
 - But - What Does Paul Say About The Jew?
 - Even Though You Practice All The Right Rituals As A Jew:
 - **"He Is Not A Jew . . . Which Is Outward In The Flesh!"** (2:28)
 - So - What **Does** Matter?
 - And - What **Is** Enough?
 - The Position - Of Your Heart!
 - 2:29a - "But He Is A Jew, Which Is One Inwardly; And Circumcision Is That Of The Heart!"
 - The Inward Reality:
 - Is The Most Important Thing!
 - Had **Their Hearts** Been Changed?
 - Has **Your Heart** Been Changed? - This Seems To Be Something:
 - That Was Hard For The Jews To Understand & To Wrap Their Heads Around!
 - Even When Nicodemus Came To Jesus By Night - In John 3 - And Jesus Told Him:
 - "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God!"
 - And - How Did Nicodemus Respond?
 - "How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?"
 - It Seemed So Much Clearer & Easier For Them:
 - To **Be** Something - Like A Jew! And:
 - To **Have** Something - Like The Law! And:
 - To **Do** Something - Like Circumcision!
 - And To Have These Things Stamped In Their Passport - To Clear Them Through:
 - The Customs Line Of Heaven!
 - But They Should Have Known:
 - That It Was The **Heart**:
 - God Was After - All Along!
 - And So Should We!
 - It Was In Deuteronomy 10:16:
 - That The Lord Said To His People:

- “Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your **heart**, and be no more stiffnecked!”
- And - It Was In Deuteronomy 30:6:
 - The Jews Were Told That:
 - “The LORD thy God will circumcise thine **heart**, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live!”
- It Is Your **Heart**:
 - That God Is After!
 - And It Is Your Heart:
 - That Needs To Be Circumcised:
 - In Order For You To Be A True Child Of God & Citizen Of Heaven!
 - And - This Can Only Happen Through:
- The Power - Of God:
 - Through His Spirit! Again:
 - 2:29 - “In / By The Spirit, And Not In / By The Letter!”
 - The Only Way For You To Have Your Heart Changed:
 - And The Only Way For You To Have A Genuine Heavenly Passport:
 - Is For The Holy Spirit Of God To Change You, By His Great Power!
 - The “Letter” Of God’s Law:
 - Could Never Change Your Heart!
 - **No** “Code Of Conduct” Ever Can! **IE**: Think About All The Rules Being Enacted To Battle This Coronavirus! Did They Change What Many College Students Were Doing For Spring Break? No! The Beaches Of Florida Are Still Teeming With People!
 - This Is Because - “Only God’s Spirit, Empowered By God’s New Covenant Grace, Can Change The Heart Of A Person And Make It Acceptable To God!” (Douglas Moo)
 - After All - As Paul Tells Us In 1 Corinthians 3:6:
 - “The letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life!”
 - Have You Had This Heart Change?
 - Have You Experienced The Power Of The Holy Spirit In This Way?
 - This Is Why The Lord Jesus Came Into This World!
 - To Save You & To Change You:
 - By Sending The Holy Spirit To All Who Turn To & Trust In Him!
 - And Then - Your Heart:
 - Can & Will Be Changed!
 - Even As We See Next - In 2:29:
- The Praise - Of A “True Jew!”
 - The Praise - Of A True Child Of God!
 - “Whose Praise Is Not Of Men, But Of God!”
 - The Jews Took Great Pride In Their Name:
 - Because - They Believed - Of All People In The World - They Were The Ones Blessed & Praised Of God!
 - After All - The Name “Jew”:
 - Comes From The Name Of:
 - The Fourth Son Of Jacob - Judah!
 - Whose Name Means “Praised!”
 - Judah Was Given This Name:
 - By His Mother, Leah - In Genesis 29:35:
 - When She Said, At His Birth - “Now will I praise the LORD!”
 - And So - A Jew - Who Is A Jew:
 - Only By Name & Ritual:
 - Seeks After And May Even Receive - The Praise Of Men!
 - But - A True Jew - Who Is A Jew:
 - In Heart & In Reality:
 - Will Live According To His Name!
 - And - Will Seek To Live For:
 - The Glory & The Praise:
 - Of The Lord!
- And This Is Why:

- The Inward Reality:
 - Is Most Important!
 - Because - It Is **By** The Heart & **From** The Heart:
 - That God Is Truly Praised!

Conclusion:

1. So - What Are You Relying Upon:
 - In Your Life Today?
2. Are Outward Rituals:
 - Your Main Focus?
 - If So - Remember That Those Rituals:
 - Religious Or Otherwise - By Themselves:
 - Are Impotent / Powerless & Pointless!
 - Even Good Things:
 - Like Reading The Bible! Praying! Going To Church! Taking Communion! Getting Baptized!
 - If They Are Not Done From A Changed & A Circumcised Heart:
 - They Are Powerless & They Are Pointless!
3. Instead - Do You Have:
 - The Inward Reality:
 - Of A Converted & A Changed Heart?
 - Because - This Is What Matters Most:
 - To The Lord!
 - And - The Changed Heart:
 - That You Need Today:
 - Can Only Come Through:
 - Christ!
4. **But** - When God **Does Change** Your Heart:
 - **All** Of Those Good Things:
 - Like Bible Reading & Prayer & Communion:
 - And Even Life Itself:
 - Will Take On A Whole New Purpose & Meaning!
 - You Can Now Do Them:
 - In True Worship Of The Lord!
 - For His Praise & For His Glory!

- * Are You Relying On Outward Rituals To Please God?
- * Has There Been An Inward Change In Your Heart?
- * Are You Doing All Things For The Glory & Praise Of The Lord?

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