

What is the truth concerning masks...? Are they helpful...? Will they accomplish what is hoped for...? ... Will they protect you...? Will they protect others...? ... I want to talk about wearing masks... today. ... Oh! **Not** the masks that we are required to wear because of Corona Virus. (We'll save that controversy for another discussion.)

The kind of “mask-wearing” that this message is concerned with... is highlighted in James chapter one... which serves as an excellent summary of our passage today in Romans. (LISTEN to what James wrote.)

James 1:22-24 (ESV)

²² But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. ²³ For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror.

²⁴ For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like.

Our passage today will be hard-hitting. It will call for us to be honest with ourselves... asking the Holy Spirit to search our hearts... and to reveal to us the truth about ourselves.

Psalm 139:23-24 (ESV)

²³ Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! ²⁴ And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!

This is a very good idea for us to do right now. Let's go to God's throne... before we begin... and ask God to use His Word to search our hearts.

- PRAY -

The title for today's message is: “*God Sees Behind Your Mask.*”

As we resume Romans chapter two... Paul continues to argue that **all** stand guilty before God. ... In chapter one... he was describing the fate of

the unbelieving... pagan Gentiles... and here in chapter two... he moves to admonish **God's people**. ... Despite their knowledge of God's will... they were guilty because they (too) refuse to completely live by it.

Those of us who have grown up in Christian families... or who have been in the church for a long-time... may know what God's Word says. ... Some who believe in the inerrancy of Scripture... some who would fight hard to defend this marvelous truth... may be lulled by a false religious security... of wearing a religious mask.

This is what Paul is getting at in the last paragraphs of Romans 2... as he deals for the final time with the objections of those who consider themselves to be so thoroughly religious... that they do not need to apply all that God reveals to them from His Word to their life.

We must each consider the question: Where does our confidence lie? Does it rest either on our **knowledge** of God's Word... or our religious affiliation? If so... we are deluded. We are wearing a mask. Take it off!

In Romans 2... verses 17-20 (where we begin today)... we read that the Jew (the “religious person” of Paul’s day)... was making the claim of four spiritual advantages. They saw themselves as “*good with God*” and therefore total obedience wasn’t necessary.

1. God has given us His law.
2. He has entered into a special relationship with us.
3. Because we have been given His law, we know His will, and
4. We approve only the most excellent of human moral standards.

Romans 2:17-20

Overconfidence... of course... was the great danger for the religious-minded Jew of Bible times. Every Jew realized that in respect to the truth he was privileged far above the rest of the people on the earth.

To the Jews who were part of the church at Rome... this must have been a shattering message. ... But it is not only for the Jew that a passage like this should be shattering. It should be shattering to us all... particularly if we find ourselves thinking that we don't need Scripture's exhortations... because of our standing before God – which we acquired by our knowledge of the Bible... generous stewardship... service in the church... baptism... or upbringing.

Whenever a follower of Christ feels superior... he/she should beware... that such an attitude is not a sign of God's grace. Our familiarity with holy things must never give way to spiritual presumption.

Looking at verses 17-20... we can gain an understanding of mask-wearing. Here are 10 good (or holy) characteristics... that often lead “good Christians” to a wrong presumption:

#1. The mask-wearer "rests in the law," that is... in the Word of God (verse 17). He possesses the Scriptures (Bible); he...

- has it in his home.
- sometimes reads it.
- carries it with him to church.
- honors it as the Word of God.

Because of this... he feels that he pleases God. He rests upon the fact that he possesses God's Word. By having God's Word... he feels he has God's

approval and acceptance. ... But this is the very mistake of the mask-wearer: God does not accept a person because he happens to have God's Word in his possession. ... God approves and accepts the person who **does** the Word of God...

2. The mask-wearer **professes God**. ... To "boast" (*kauchasai*) means to glory in... to feel proud about one's profession of God and religion. The idea is that one *openly* professes that he believes in God.... He is not ashamed of his belief and religious affiliation. ... He believes in God and he feels safe and secure in his belief. ... He confesses God out in public (to others) and he feels that God accepts him because of his profession.

However... this is *the mistake* of the mask-wearer. God is not interested in a man's **profession** but in a man's **life**. ... God wants a man **living** for Him... not just professing and talking about Him.

3. The mask-wearer **knows God's will** (verse 18). He is familiar with the law and the commandments of God. He knows what God wants done; he knows right from wrong. Therefore... he feels he has God's approval.

However... the mask-wearer fails to see something: **knowing** God's will is not enough—a man must **do** God's will.

4. The mask-wearer **approves the excellent or better things in life** (verse 18, still). He not only knows God's will... right from wrong; but he...

- is able to discern the more excellent, the better things to do.
- approves, expresses, and proclaims pleasure in the right things.

Because he supports and pushes and approves good Christian activities... the mask-wearer feels he pleases God. But this is his mistake. God is not interested in man's approval of the better things in life. Most men do approve and talk about the better things of life. God wants man living out the better things.

5. The mask-wearer is taught God's law and Word (verse 18). He might surround himself with the best sermon broadcasts of well-known Bible expositors. He even reads from the same commentaries and reference works that his favorite Bible teacher mentions. ... The mask-wearer learns God's Word from someone... and because he knows God's Word he feels he has a right relationship with God. ... But again... God's concern is not in what a person knows... but in what a person does. God expects a person to live as he has been taught.

6. The mask-wearer is sure he is a guide to the blind (verse 19). The word "sure" (*pepoithas*) means persuaded and confident. The mask-wearer is convinced that his understanding is true... that the teaching he has is the way men should live. ... He believes that a man who does not believe in his discovered truth is blind... and needs to be guided to the truth. He feels...

- he is an example to men.
- he is a guide to help men find God.
- he can cure men of their blindness to God and their separation from Him.

However, being "confident" that one is a guide of the blind does not mean that one is a true guide. A person must be sure that he himself is following the truth, Jesus Christ (John 14:6).

7. The mask-wearer *is sure he is a light to those in darkness* (verse 19).

The word "darkness" (*skotei*) means those who stumble about searching for the light... but are unable to find it. The mask-wearer feels he has found the light; therefore... he is a light to those who are searching for it. ...

However... the mask-wearer makes a serious mistake. Bible knowledge is not the light of the world—Jesus Christ is.

8. The mask-wearer *is sure he is an instructor of the foolish* (verse 20).

The word "foolish" (*aphronōn*) means thoughtless... senseless... undirected. It refers to people who walk through life giving no thought to life's purpose... as to...

- where they have come from.
- why they are here.
- where they are going.

The mask-wearer is persuaded that religion answers all these questions... the basic questions of life. Therefore... he can help the foolish discover meaning and purpose and significance in life. ... The critical point for the instructor (or the mask-wearer)... is to make sure that his instruction is true. What he instructs must be the truth or else it is all for naught.

9. The mask-wearer *is sure he is a teacher of the immature* (verse 20).

The word "children" (*nēpiōn*) means the infant... the immature... the

novice... the proselyte... the new church member. ... The point is the same: a mask-wearer is not mature in God just because he...

- has been baptized and has been a church member for a long time.
- thinks he is mature.
- serves as a teacher.

What makes a person mature and capable of teaching the immature of the world is experience with Christ... having walked and served with Christ for a long time.

10. The mask-wearer has the law of God... the embodiment of knowledge and of the truth (20). The mask-wearer has the Scriptures... the Word of God... at his disposal. ... He has every opportunity in the world to know the truth. ... But again... having and knowing and thinking that one can instruct and teach another is not enough. God accepts and uses only those who live the Word... (who keep the laws and commandments of God.)

(LISTEN!) You know whether or not you wear a mask... if your spiritual privileges produce any kind of arrogance – rather than humility.

Whenever a follower of Christ feels superior... he should beware... for such an attitude is not a sign of God's grace. ... To come into a position of spiritual privilege... only to succumb to self-righteous arrogance... indicates that one's soul is in great danger.

You may feel privileged by God because of a certain training you have received. ... Maybe you have sat under the teaching of a great Bible teacher... or subscribed to the right Christian magazine or blog... watched the right Christian videos... been a vital part of a “cutting-edge” church or

ministry. ... If it has given you a sense of "spiritual arrogance"... (that you are better quality to other believers...) then you are in a dangerous place. Rip the mask off!

Next Paul cross-examines the mask wearers of his day...

Romans 2:21-24

Far from being an asset... the Jew's access to the truth was a ***liability*** for which he was terribly accountable... at the bar of God. ... (LISTEN!) there is nothing that will turn strangers away from the truth... faster than misbehavior of a mask-wearer.

When Abraham denied his wife in Egypt... and Sarai was taken into Pharaoh's harem... Abraham ceased to be a source of blessing to the Egyptians and became instead a source of cursing and plague. ... Eventually Pharaoh discovered the source of his troubles and demanded an accounting from Abraham. "*What is this that you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? Why did you say, She is my sister?*" ... To none of these indignant questions did the embarrassed Abraham have a reply. Humanly speaking... his testimony for Jehovah was finished so far as Pharaoh was concerned. The full story is in Genesis 12:10-20.

When David sinned with Bathsheba... a similar situation arose. ... Nathan (the prophet)... having wrung David's conscience with his masterly parable and its application... charged home to him the full implications of David's guilt in the unforgettable words... "*You have given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme*" (II Sam. 12:14). ... It is a remarkable

fact... too... that to this day David is held up deridingly by unbelievers as an example of "*a man after God's own heart.*" Probably Paul had this example of David in mind when he added "*as it is written*" in verse 24... after his statement concerning the behavior of the Jews making the Gentiles blaspheme.

Paul mentions stealing... committing adultery... and robbing temples. When a professing believer commits any of these... they turn unsaved people away from the truth. ... And someone who is wearing a mask right now might say... wew! ... Paul wrote about other people's sins. None of those are mine. – But hold on... "Mask Wearer"!

We should not think that we have kept this commandment... just because we have not forced our way into another person's home... and walked off with his possessions. ... 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. ... We steal if we sell something for more than it is worth. ... We steal from the government when we fudge on our taxes. ... We steal when we borrow something and do not return it. We steal from ourselves when we waste our talents... time... or money. ... Bosses steal from employees ... if they do not pay them enough to guarantee a healthy... adequate standard of living.

Concerning adultery... you probably remember what Jesus said...

Matthew 5:27-28 (ESV)

²⁷ *"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.'*

²⁸ *But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.*

Oh mask-wearer... (let me ask)... do you live purely...? ... What are you looking at... and watching... and reading... and listening to...? Do you:

- see an attractive person and look a second and third time?
- read pornographic books, magazines, and novels?
- allow lustful thoughts to linger in your mind?
- dress in a manner exposing your body?
- watch and support television films that have scenes of immorality?

Ouch! OK... How about me moving on to the next sin... which certainly no one here is guilty of – “robbing temples.” ... Oh! Wait! We might have some “temple robbers.”

The word for robbing temples is - (*hierosuleō*). It means to violate one's commitment to God... and to rob from God. ... It means to consider something more important than God... something so important that it *requires*...

- the commitment that you owe God.
- the tithes and offerings that you owe God.

You say that you worship God and abhor idols... yet you take what belongs to God — your commitment... your time... your energy... your tithes — and you give it to something else. ... You make something else more important than God... you make it an idol. ... This is one of the major sins of the mask-wearer.

Verse 24... *"The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles (...the unsaved ... the godless) because of you..."*Someone has put Paul's point here in poetic language:

*The gospel is written a chapter a day
By deeds that you do and words that you say.
Men read what you say, whether faithless or true,
Say, what is the gospel according to you?*

... .. [P A U S E]

There is another danger (a natural twin to the danger of thinking we are acceptable to God because we have the truth)... namely... thinking we are right before the Lord... because we are affiliated with his people. The Jews supposed they were secure... because they were part of God's chosen people through circumcision. They believed circumcision somehow secured salvation. Rabbi Menachem, in his commentary on the Book of Moses, wrote, *"Our Rabbis have said that no circumcised man will see Hell."* Another said, *"Circumcision saves from Hell."* The midrash Tillim says, *"God swore to Abraham that no one who was circumcised should be sent to Hell."*

Romans 2:25-29

Circumcision (as with any ritual) was supposed to function as a symbol of a commitment already present... not as a way to earn God's favor. ... It was something like a wedding ring between God and his people. ...

Circumcision was of great value if one understood and lived its intended significance.

However... if its meaning was disregarded... it was as meaningless as a wedding ring on an adulterer's finger. To wear a wedding ring speaks of something sacred. But to be unfaithful to that which it stands for... makes the wedding ring a disgrace. ... The point Paul is making here is that circumcision should stand for something.

Let me put this in terms that might hit closer to home. ... Which would you prefer: an unfaithful spouse who proudly wears your wedding band... or a mate who guards your shared intimacy with his or her life... but doesn't wear a ring? ... The wedding band is supposed to be an outward symbol of what's true of the wearer's heart. ... How foolish to think that the ring is the most important element of a marital union. Furthermore, how foolish to think that a ring can keep a person faithful to his or her mate.

A rite or ritual is meaningful only insofar as it is the outward expression of an inward experience. No outward ceremonial act (like baptism or communion or being received into a fellowship of believers through church membership) can have any value if it is not related in some way to a dynamic... personal... scriptural spiritual experience. ... It is a mockery if the person who is baptized... or who takes communion gives no evidence of salvation. This also can be said of church membership. The lives of church members can make membership a mockery.

As we rap things up here (in this passage)... I would like to ask two very important questions... and have you contemplate your response. We are about to take communion together... and this would be an excellent time to meditate on these two matters.

- The first one is - our title: The label “Christian” should be worn with honor. To declare yourself a Christian is to publicly affirm a code of conduct that others can trust... and to invite your peers to hold you accountable. ... But here is the question: When we don the title “Christian” - who receives the glory, God or self?
- Here is the second matter – it concerns our knowledge of God’s will: Scripture has revealed that God’s will is to reclaim His creation from evil... and then fill it with His righteousness. ... Scripture has also declared how He will do this... and what specific events will signal His coming. (Now are you ready for the question? ... Here it is.) Are we simply biding our time... until end-time events usher in the next age... or are we actively taking part in God’s plan to reach our world with the good news and fill it with His righteousness?

God sees through our masks!