

REAL OR RELIGIOUS | ROMANS 2:17-29 | PASTOR MARK BOFILL | 08/01/2024

**I. Claims of the Religious Jew (v. 17-20) | II. Charades of a Religious Jew (v.21-24) | III. Circumcision of a Religious Jew (v.25-29)*

INTRO: *Some local boys were gathered together seemingly in some kind of mischief. A priest approached them and asked what they were up to? The boys simply replied, "We are trying to see who can tell the biggest lie." The priest became shocked and responded, "When I was your age, I never even thought of conjuring up such treachery." The boys looked at each other and nodded their heads in agreement saying, "Okay, you win."* / **There are some Religious people who believe that they are without sin.** They feel as if they have a special standing with God because of some external practice or association. This is nothing more than a farce, for we know that we are only declared righteous through belief in Jesus Christ as Savior. Today we will examine how Paul challenges the Jew's challenges if they are **REAL OR RELIGIOUS?***

I. CLAIMS OF THE RELIGIOUS JEW (v. 17-20) – Paul questions their many claims...

A. Their Claims of Heritage (17a) – *"Indeed you are called a Jew..."* **RITUAL**

- 1. They were called a "Jew"** - From the word "**Judah**," is means "praise to God." The name of Jew was to be the attitude of the hearts, not just a name of a nation. Yet, they relied upon their name and the law instead of the Lord!
- 2. They were God's chosen people** – This meant that they had a responsibility. However, because they had the law, they rested on that alone for their righteousness, and they didn't feel as if they needed a savior. *[As God's children, we have a responsibility, because we bear His great name]*

B. Their Claims of Knowledge (17b-18) *"...and rest on the law, and make your boast in God, 18 and know His will, and approve the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law,"* – True knowledge should lead you to a state of humility, not arrogance. If it is arrogance, then you know that it is flesh. As a Christian, is my life about knowledge only, or for what really matters? **Relationship!** *[Again, with knowledge comes responsibility].*

- 1. They Rested on the Law (17b)** – They believed that the Law would save them. They thought the law covered their sin, when in reality it revealed their sin. Our souls will be ruined if we rest on the Law. The Jews looked everywhere else for rest and security, but Jesus. **TRUE REST is only IN Jesus!**
- 2. They Boasted in God (17c)** – They literally bragged of Jehovah being their God. Now, boasting in God is good if you are in a right relationship with Him, but if you aren't, then you're a hypocrite!
- 3. They Knew His will (18a)** – They knew God's will yet failed to perform God's will in their heart.
 - a. (Hosea 6:6)** *"For I desire mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings."*
 - b. (Micah 6:8)** *"He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you; but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God."*
- 4. They Approved of Excellent Things (18b)** – Their own stamp of approval.
- 5. They were Instructed out of the Law (18c)** – Being instructed out of the Law, they chose rather to embrace the letter of the Law, rather than the Spirit of the law. *[Expound on legalism]*

C. Their Claims of Self-Confidence (19-20) *“and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, 20 an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, having the form of knowledge and truth in the law.”* **Their confidence was in themselves and their ability to keep the law.**

1. They were **Guides** to the blind (19a) – Jesus referred to them as guides, (Matt 15:14) *“Let them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch.”*
2. They were **Lights** to those in darkness (19c) – They believed that they could show the right way.
3. They were **Instructors** of the foolish (20a) – The uninformed saw them as religious!
4. They were **Teachers** of babes (20b) – Probably the Gentile proselytes to Judaism. (Matt 23:15)
5. They had the **Form of knowledge and truth in the Law (20c)** – Although the Jews should have gratefully received the law as a gift from God, Paul later shows how mere possession of the law justifies no one. – **Note on Religiosity – Two Dangers here:** 1) Thinking that we are okay with God because we have knowledge. – 2) Thinking that we are right with God because we are affiliated with His people.

Closing Point: *Every “boast” of the Jew in this passage concerns possession.* The Jewish people of Paul’s Days were extremely proud and confident in the fact that God gave His holy Law to *them* as a nation. They believed this confirmed their status as a specially chosen people, and thus insured their salvation.

II. CHARADES OF THE RELIGIOUS JEW - (v.21-24) *“You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal? 22 You who say, “Do not commit adultery,” do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? 23 You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law? 24 For “The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you,” as it is written.”* **Paul now sarcastically rebukes the religious Jews in the form of questions, and lists five negative attributes that they practiced:**

A. Their Immorality (21) – Sin against others

1. **As teachers, do they teach themselves? (21a)** – As a teacher, we are more responsible to practice what we preach, (Matt 23:2-3) says: *“The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. 3 Therefore, whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do.”*
2. **What they taught: Do not steal, do they steal themselves? (21b)** – Actually, they were guilty of stealing from God. (Mal 3:8-9) *“Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, ‘In what way have we robbed You?’ In tithes and offerings. 9 You are cursed with a curse, for you have robbed Me, Even this whole nation.”* [The whole nation was guilty of this!]

B. Their Sensuality (22a) – They say, *“Do not commit adultery...do you practice adultery?”* (cf. Hos 9:1)

C. Their Idolatry (22b) – *Do you hate idols and rob temple?* This generally referred to a direct violation of God’s command in (Deut 7:25), of looting pagan temples, and selling their idols and vessels for personal profit under the pretext of religion [they should have destroyed the accursed things by fire!]

D. Their Hypocrisy (23) – Boasting in the law yet breaking the Law! [*Pharisees, like a bad cop or politician!*]

E. Their Blasphemy (24) – A reference to (**Ezek 20:27**). God's name was blasphemed amongst the Gentiles because of them. [*We can do the same thing today, when we claim that we are Christians, but our lives reveal something else*]. – **D.L. Moody was walking down the street, and there was a drunken man lying in the gutter. The guy with him said “look, there is one of your converts,” and D.L. Moody replied, “He may very well be one of my converts, but quite obviously he was not one of Jesus’.”**

P/A – *Have I done something that brings reproach to the name of God lately?* – **Religiosity** – **Two Dangers here:** **1)** Thinking that we are exempt from the standards of the Law; **2)** Thinking that we are lifting up the name of God, when we are really blaspheming it by our lifestyle.

Closing Point: In the game of **Charades**, the object is to guess what the person is trying to communicate by their actions. In a similar manner, a religious person's actions will communicate who they really are.

- **In the Gospel of Matthew**, we see that Jesus bore witness to what the religious leaders of His day were communicating, and **He exposed their hypocrisy; (Matt 23:27,28)** *“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. 28 Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.”* They practiced the external things perfectly, yet they *“neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone.”* (**Matt 23:23b**)

III. CIRCUMCISION OF THE RELIGIOUS JEW (v.25-29) – The two most important things to a Jew was the possession of the law, and circumcision. Having dealt with their claims of possessing the Law, **Paul now exposes the truth of circumcision.**

A. Paul Indicts Circumcision (25) *“For circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the law; but if you are a breaker of the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision”* – Circumcision was to be performed by the Jew as an act of obedience, and a reminder of their covenant relationship to God (**Gen 17:10**).

1. Circumcision can be profitable for the Jew/if he keeps the law (25a) i.e., if his heart is right with God! Circumcision for most Jews was usually done after the eighth day, and therefore never really was a response of the heart. [*Similar to infant baptism*]

2. Circumcision can be profitless for the Jew/if he breaks the Law (25b) – The Jew believed that His circumcision guaranteed his salvation. He might be *punished* in the world to come but could never be ultimately *lost*. [*This is incorrect according to scripture.*]

a. In Paul's day, some Rabbis taught that Abraham sat at the entrance of Hell and made certain that none of his circumcised descendants went there. Some Rabbis also taught *“God will judge the Gentiles with one measure and the Jews with another”* and *“All Israelites will have part in the world to come, regardless how they lived.”* [*This is likewise contrary to what is taught in the scripture!*]

b. For the record, Circumcision, Baptism, or any ritual in itself, cannot save anyone! Even in Abraham's day, Ishmael, the son of the flesh, was circumcised, but it did not make him a son of the covenant. [*Expound on wrong baptism – a wet sinner*]

B. Paul's Conclusion on Circumcision (26) *"Therefore, if an uncircumcised man keeps the righteous requirements of the law, will not his uncircumcision be counted as circumcision?"*

1. Paul **hypothetically claims** that **an uncircumcised man can actually keep the righteous requirement (26a) – How can this be?** ...because God shows no partiality to men (Rom 2:11; Acts 10:34), and He is not a respecter of persons!
2. Paul **provides the principle (26b)** – by keeping the **"righteous requirement,"** it results in **uncircumcision being credited as circumcision** – God will regard the believing Gentile as favorably as a circumcised believing Jew! [*This stumbled many Jews, b/c they could not get past the letter of the Law*]

C. Paul Clarifies his Claims (27) *"And will not the physically uncircumcised, if he fulfills the law, judge you who, even with your written code and circumcision, are a transgressor of the law?"*

1. **A Gentile's humble obedience to the Law...** will serve as a stern rebuke to the Jew who, in spite of his great advantages, **lives in disobedience!**
2. **It was absolutely unheard of for the Jew to be judged by a Gentile,** because the Gentiles were considered as dogs. Once again, their interpretations of the Law of Moses were skewed. **(Deut 10:16)**, *"Therefore circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer"*

D. Paul Clarifies what an Outward Jew is (28) *"For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh."* **Outward Jews only make the heritage claim!** - John the Baptist said this regarding those who would make this claim, but their hearts were far from God, *"Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8 Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, 9 and do not think to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.'"* *For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones."* (Matt 3:7-9)

E. Paul Clarifies what a Spiritual Jew is (29) *"but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God."*

1. **The real Jew is one who is inwardly a Jew (in the heart through faith) (29a) – This speaks of a true child of God;** the true spiritual seed of Abraham which comes through faith **(Rom 4:16; Gal 3:2)** – **(Deut 30:6)** *"And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live."* [*What needs to be cut away?*]
2. **The real Jew is devoted in his spirit to God. (29b)** – Salvation results from the work of God's spirit in the heart, not mere external efforts to uphold the law.
3. **The real Jew will receive praise from God (29c)** *"...Whose praise is not from men but from God"* – All the outward signs of religion may earn us praise **from men**, but they will not earn us praise **from God**. The **evidence of our rightness** with God is not contained in outward signs or works, and it is not assured because of our parentage; the **evidence is found in the work of God in our hearts.**

Religiosity – Two Dangers here: 1) Thinking that we are right with God based on our Heritage. 2) Thinking that we are right with God on the basis external rituals.

Closing Point: Circumcision and Baptism do about the same thing that a label on a can does. If the outer label doesn't match with what is on the inside, something is wrong! If there are carrots inside the can, you can put a label that says "Peas," but it doesn't change what is inside the can. However, becoming **born again** changes what is inside the can, and then you can put the appropriate label on the outside!

- So, having said all that I want to ask you: **Are You REAL OR RELIGIOUS?**
- What are the rituals that you might try to claim credit for in the presence of God? Will they stand?
- What is it that you boast in? – *There is none righteous, no not one!* **(Rom 3:10)**