Discussion Guide

A Hypocrite's mask: Religion
Romans 2:25-29 | November 22, 2026

I. Opening Prayer

- Ask the Holy Spirit to help your group learn and hear what He would teach and encourage

II. Weekly Sermon Discussion (20-40 minutes)

- Read the scriptures, and discuss what stood out to you.
- Engage with one another by reflecting and sharing what our Church is learning together.
- Example insights and questions are provided to help generate discussion if needed.

Focus your conversation on the scripture and how it applies to you. Be careful of straying off the topic, and if you do, encourage one another to ask "How does this scripture apply to this?".

The Mask of Religion

Think about an area of life outside of church (work, parenting, fitness, hobbies). What is a common "shortcut" or "mask" people use to look like they are succeeding when they're actually struggling?

Read: Romans 2:25-29

Ritual and external religion cannot cover an unrepentant heart. God isn't impressed by outward performance for human applause; He desires an inward transformation produced by the Holy Spirit.

Share with the group what stood out to you in the sermon or reading.

The Trap of Ritual (vv. 25–27): Paul tells his readers that "circumcision minus obedience equals uncircumcision." In modern church culture, what are some spiritual habits or religious "badges" (baptism, church attendance, serving, Bible knowledge) that we can mistakenly treat as proof that we are right with God?

The Heart of the Matter (vv. 28–29): Paul contrasts a religion of the "letter" (external rules) with a religion of the "Spirit" (inward heart change). What is the practical difference between obeying God out of a perceived external pressure versus obeying Him from a changed heart?

Defiled vs. Pure Religion

Read and discuss how the scriptures below describe a defiled or pure religion.

Defiled Religion (Using religion as a mask)

1) **Performs for Applause** (Matt. 6:1; 23:5–7)

Diagnostic: What is the greater motivation for you?

- a deep walk with God
- people believing you have a deep walk with God

2) **Manufactures Righteousness** (Isa. 64:6; Luke 18:11–12)

Diagnostic: What defines the spiritual health of your relationship with God?

- the completed work of Jesus

- your continuing works

3) **Majors in the Minors** (Matt. 23:23–24; Micah 6:8)

Diagnostic: By what do you measure your spiritual maturity?
- how well you keep your religious rules and routines
- how well you love and show mercy to others

Which of these three "masks" is the easiest for you to slip into without realizing it? Why?

<u>Pure Religion</u> (A heart transformed by the Spirit)

1) **Worships from the Heart** (Matt. 15:7–9)

Diagnostic: When you engage in worship, prayer, or Scripture, are you mostly?
- striving to love God and surrender to Him
- checking off a spiritual to-do list

2) **Serves out of Love** (Gal. 5:6)

Diagnostic: When you serve people who can offer you nothing in return, what drives you?
- genuine compassion born from God's love for you
- a sense of duty, guilt, or obligation

3) **Guards Against Compromise** (James 1:26–27)

Diagnostic: When culture's values clash with Scripture, how do you respond?
- let God's Word reshape your cravings and choices
- quietly blend in so you don't stand out or miss out

Where do you sense the Holy Spirit inviting you to grow in pure religion?

A Next Step! Wednesday December 2, 7pm Worship & Baptism Night

Baptism is a visible picture of an invisible reality—the Spirit washing away sin and giving us a new heart. If you haven't taken that step of obedience yet, what is holding you back? Register on the app! Come and join in worship with your church as we practice pure religion together.

III. Share & Prayer (20-40 minutes)

Time to 'take off the mask'! Jesus doesn't want us to be hypocrites who wear masks.

- A personal life update, your current spiritual condition. Use emotional language to be real!
- Challenges or victories that you are experiencing
- What's really going on in your life? How are you doing? How can your group pray for you?
- Are there applications from the Discussion that you need prayer support?
- How can your Group support you this week?

When sharing prayer requests, include your personal prayer needs. Example – rather than simply sharing "Please pray for my friend's cancer journey", include personal prayer: "Please pray as I'm struggling with my friend's cancer journey, and I need guidance on how to encourage her in this season".

Have someone, or everyone, close your time out in prayer for one another.