

GRACE TO YOU

ROMANS 2:25-29

I'M A JEW! HOPE YOU ARE TOO.



FIRST BYRON CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH

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OCTOBER 30, 2022 (PM)

INTRODUCTION

How would you feel if I stood here and said, "None of you are true Americans"? What if I went even further and said, "Illegal immigrants are more American than you are"? I might not be a pastor for long! Yet, Paul did something very similar to the Jews of his day. He said, "You are not real Jews. In fact some Gentiles are more Jewish than you are!"

Why? Why did Paul say something so stark, so provocative, so annoying, so insulting, so outrageous, so aggravating? Because he wanted to address the most dangerous devilish lie throughout all history. What is that? What is the most dangerous devilish lie in all human history? It's this: Outward religion is enough. That's the lie that's damned more souls than any other. It's damned Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists. But also Jews, and yes, even Christians. **How do we defeat the most dangerous devilish lie in all human history?** Paul gives us the answer in Romans 2:17-29. But to really understand Paul's point here, we need to look at the background to it and why he wrote about this here.

BACKGROUND

- **Chapter 1:19-32** The Gentiles are guilty before God
- **Chapter 2:1-11** The Jews are guilty before God
- **Chapter 3:1-19** All are guilty before God.

Why did Paul devote three chapters to proving the guilt of all? Because so few want to face up to their sin and guilt. I read recently that while attendance at Mass is growing in the Roman Catholic church, attendance at confession has never been lower. A teacher at Boston College asked members of his philosophy class to write an anonymous essay about a personal struggle over right and wrong, good and evil. Most of the students were unable to complete the assignment. When asked, "Why?" most of them said, "We haven't done anything wrong." Few feel their guilt, few want to feel their guilt, and most resist any feelings of guilt. That's why so many are satisfied with just outward religion (and no religion).

Paul knew that people would never see the danger of the lie "outward religion is enough" until they saw the truth about their own sinfulness and guilt. A little guilt can be covered with the veneer of outward religion, but great guilt will smash that veneer to pieces and make people realize they need much more than some pieces of outward religion. In these closing verses of Romans 2, he is especially addressing the religious who trusted in outward religion, the Jews who thought Nationality + Law + Circumcision = Salvation.



How does Paul combat the most devilish lie in history?



1. OUTWARD JEWS ARE NOT JEWS (28)

For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical (28).

Outward Jews are frauds

- **They had the light:** They relied on the law (17), boasted in God (17), knew God's will (18), approved of God's morals (18), and were well-instructed in the truth (18).
- **They shone the light:** They tried to guide the blind (19), shine in the darkness (19), correct the foolish (20), and teach the immature (20).
- **They didn't walk in the light:** They had the light, tried to shine the light, but did not live in the light. They didn't do what they commanded, and did what they forbad (21-25).
- **They polluted the light:** Their spiritual theft and spiritual adultery prevented Gentiles from seeing the true light, and, worse, made them blaspheme the light.

Outward Jews are flesh-powered

The rabbis taught that circumcision saved from hell, that Abraham sat before the gates of heaven and didn't allow any uncircumcised Israelite to enter. Circumcision was salvation. But Paul rejected this reliance on the flesh. **"For circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law, but if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision"** (25). Circumcision was not only a marker of religious identity and of belonging to God and his covenant family. It was also a commitment to cut oneself off from sin. If a Jew did not cut themselves off from sin, it didn't matter how much flesh they cut off from their bodies. In fact, God viewed them as uncircumcised. Circumcision was not designed to be just outward and physical but to be reflected in the inward and spiritual.

Outward Jews are fame-hungry

Why were so many Jews so focused on the flesh? Because they were so focused on impressing others and getting praised by others (29). Their religion was not about giving glory to God but getting glory from others. When religion was all about the outward and the physical, it needed the praise of others to keep it going.

CHANGING OUR STORIES WITH GOD'S STORY

Outward Christians are not Christians. Just like the Jews of Paul's day, there are professing Christians whose religion is fraudulent, flesh-powered, and fame-hungry. Such "Christians" are not Christians. He/she is not a Christian who is merely one outwardly, nor is baptism outward and physical. If the outward and the physical are all we have, we have nothing worth having.

Flee all fraud, flesh, and fame. These are three mortal enemies of true religion, true Christianity. Hypocrisy, independence, and people-pleasing are your greatest enemies and we must flee and fight them every day by faith.

FAITH FIGHTS FRAUD, FLESH, AND FAME



If that's an outward Jew, what's an inward Jew?



2. INWARD JEWS ARE TRUE JEWS (29)

A Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God (29).

Inward Jews are sincere

If a man who is uncircumcised keeps the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? (26). This is a rhetorical question, one which has such an obvious answer that Paul doesn't give it. In contrast to the fraudulent Jews who had lots of light and walked in darkness, these Gentiles had little light but walked in it. Unlike the double-standard Jews, these Gentiles were sincere in their obedience. The inward matched the outward. Their heart and life aligned. Their sincere lives condemned the Jews' acting lives. **He who is physically uncircumcised but keeps the law will condemn you who have the written code and circumcision but break the law** (27). The privilege of circumcision was cancelled by Jewish disobedience, and the disadvantage of Gentile uncircumcision was removed by sincere obedience.

Inward Jews are Spirit-powered

Rather than relying in the flesh, the Gentile believers relied on the Spirit (29). They put no trust in flesh or force, not in cut skin or force of will, but in the work of the Holy Spirit. Their obedience was not the result of mere human effort but of divine power. This need for Spirit-change and Spirit-power was actually nothing new. It was the consistent message of the Old Testament (Dt. 10:16; 30:6; Jer. 4:4; 9:26) and was carried on through the New Testament (1 Cor. 7:19; Gal. 5:6; 6:15; Phil. 3:1). The Spirit-surgeon removed what the skin-surgeon could never remove - hardness of heart (Ezek. 36:37b; 11:19-20). The Spirit did what the letter could never do.

Inward Jews want secret praise

In contrast to the outward Jew who was motivated by human praise, the inward Jew was motivated by God's praise. Whereas the outward Jew had to do everything publicly to get human praise, the inward Jew is happy to do things secretly and privately because for him/her, God's praise is more than enough. The name "Jew" is derived from "Judah" whose name in the Old Testament was associated with the verb "to praise" (Gen. 29:35; 49:8). "Jew" therefore means "Praise" and could be understood actively as "Praiser" or passively as "Praised." God's praisers will be praised by God.

CHANGING OUR STORIES WITH GOD'S STORY

Inward Christians are true Christians. A Christian is one inwardly, and baptism is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God. Examine and encourage yourself with this truth. Sincerity, spirit-empowerment, and secret praise are all linked. Each strengthens and grows the other.

I'm a Jew, I hope you are too! Do you see why gave this sermon this title? Christianity is not the rejection of Judaism; it's the fulfillment of it. The New Testament is not Plan B; it's the fulfillment of Plan A. The Christian looks on outward Jews with pity and says, "Forsake your false Judaism, and embrace true Judaism." We don't ask them to forsake Jewish truth but to flee Jewish error. If you ever have opportunity to talk to a Jewish person about religion, why not start the conversation with, "I'm a Jew too..."

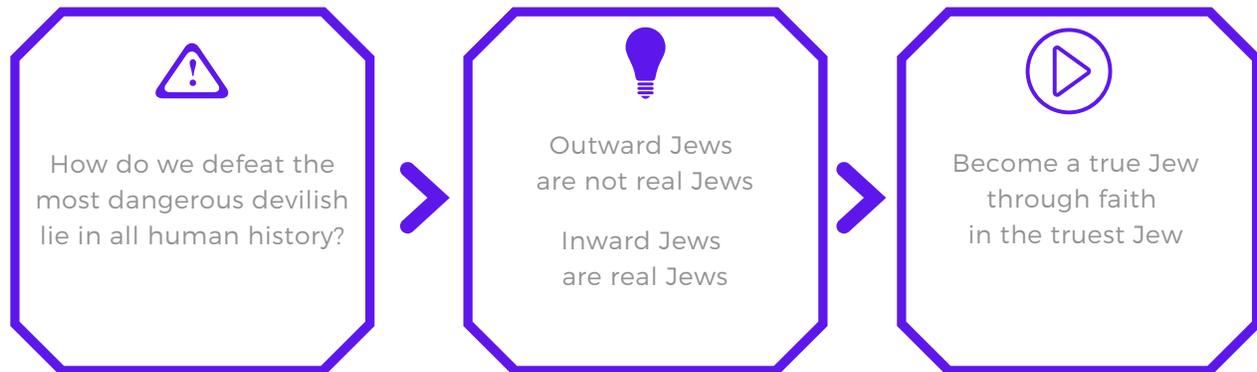
SINCERE + SPIRIT + SECRET = SALVATION



Hear God's Story > Change your story > Tell the story > Change others' stories



SUMMARY



A NEW CHAPTER

Gospel. The truest ever Jew was Jesus Christ. He was an inward Jew, not just an outward Jew. He was sincere not a fraud, Spirit-powered not flesh-powered, and pleased God not people. He was the perfect Judah, the perfect praiser of God, and was perfectly praised by God. Our only hope of being a true Jew is through faith in the truest ever Jew.

Evangelism. Bring this message to a false Jew or a false Christian this week. Religion does not have to be such a drudge, such an effort, such an act. It can be liberating, energizing, and satisfying. Bring this message to yourself firstly and continually.

Prayer. Make me a true Jew by making me a true Christian. Deliver me from fraud, flesh, and fame. Deliver me to sincerity, Spirit, and secret praise. Keep me from the most dangerous devilish lie in human history by giving me faith in the most saving truth in all history.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What do you think is the most dangerous, devilish lie in history?
2. How has this lie influenced you or people you know?
3. Where have you seen fraud, flesh, and fame in your own life?
4. Where have you seen sincerity, the Spirit, and secrecy in your life?
5. How did this sermon help you understand and love Jesus more?
6. How would you use this sermon to help someone who is still only an outward Christian?

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