



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Romans 2:17-29

"Rite Versus Righteousness"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] The Scripture reading is from Romans chapter 2, verse 17 through verse 29.

Romans chapter 2, verse 17 through verse 29. The apostle, you will remember, is seeking to charge both the Gentiles and Jews with guilt and sin before the Lord and he has finished with the Gentiles at the end of chapter 1. He has set forth some principles of judgment in chapter 2 and now in verse 17, he identifies the person about whom he has been really speaking in this 2nd chapter. He had called him, "O man" in verse 1 and then again in verse 3, "O man," but now he identifies him. And the remainder of chapter 2 is concerned primarily with the religious Jew who, consenting to what the apostle has been saying about the lost condition of Gentiles, nevertheless, has failed to realize that it does apply to him as well. And, particularly to him, because he is a person who hypocritically accords the Scriptures there place as the word of God, but does not give himself to obedience to its statutes. And so, verse 17 begins with,

"But if thou art called a Jew, and retest in the law, and makest thy boast of God, and knowest his will, and approvest the things that are more excellent, (That expression means to appreciate moral distinctions) being instructed out of the law; and art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them who are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, who hast the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law. Thou therefore who teachest another, teachest

thou not thyself? Thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal? Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? Thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege? Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God? For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles on account of you, as it is written. For circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the law: but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision.”

(You'll recognize, incidentally, through these last verses that the apostle is speaking about the sign of the Abrahamic covenant, which was circumcision in the male. And, from our studies in Genesis, I'm sure that many of you remember what an important part that played in the inauguration of the Abrahamic covenant. It was the sign that one had righteousness ideally, but, as is so often the case, the sign has become mistaken for reality. And so, the apostle speaks to that point. The Old Testament made it very plain, both in the law in Deuteronomy, in the prophets in Ezekiel, especially in Jeremiah, that circumcision was designed to be of the heart and not simply in the flesh. We shall refer to that later. So the apostle is talking about a religious rite. You can think of baptism in our present age as something that is parallel with this. So listen to his words now in verse 26 and following.)

“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 fulfill the law, judge thee, who by the letter and circumcision dost transgress the law? (Perhaps that word "by" would be better rendered by "with" and you would understand it a little better, "Who with the letter (that is the law) and circumcision still dost transgress the law?") For he is not a Jew, who is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, who 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.”

Those last words "whose praise is not of men, but of God" are a play on words, which might be lost to the English reader who does not realize that the term "praise" is derived ultimately in biblical literature from the word that comes to mean "Jew" or "Judah." The Hebrew word *yadah* means to cast and then comes to mean to cast or throw and thus to praise. *Yehudah*, Judah, means praise. Judah, remember, was one of the sons of Jacob. His name was praise. We saw that in Genesis chapter 49, Genesis about chapter 28. And so, in the end of this 29th verse, when he says "whose praise is not of men, but of God," he's thinking of the Jew and Judaism and their name is Mr. Praise. And so, he said "whose Judaism or whose praise is not of men, but of God." The play on words would be obvious to someone who realized that Jew and Judaism come or related to the word for praise. May the Lord bless this reading of his word.

[Prayer removed from audio]

[Message] ...assured us that it was the may of assurance. And so, if you noticed, I sang it [Laughter]. He wasn't talking about me directly, but he was talking about Dr. Chafer, I think. I didn't ask him, but Dr. Chafer used to say, "No, we cannot sing that 'O may I.'" And so, he used to instruct us at the seminary to sing, "When he shall come with trumpet sound, O then I shall in him be found." But Mark, as long as it's the may of assurance, I'll sing it. [Laughter]

Now we're turning to the subject, "Rite Versus Righteousness" today as we continue our exposition of the Epistle to the Romans. There is an old and very archaic saying, "A hypocrite is a man who stole the livery of heaven to serve the devil in." That sentiment, the sentiment of that ancient word, may cast some light on the fact that the most terrible words that our Lord ever spoke were words that concerned hypocrisy. It would be difficult to find in all of language stronger, more pungent, and pointed words than the words that the Lord Jesus speaks recorded for us in Matthew

chapter 23. Let me just read a few verses from Matthew chapter 23 in which our Lord announces seven woes upon the Pharisees,

"But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither permit them that are entering to go in. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than of yourselves. Woe unto you, ye blind guides, who say, 'Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is debtor!' Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye pay tithes of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, justice, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. Ye blind guides, who strain out a gnat, and swallow a camel. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchers of the righteous, and say, 'If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partaker with them in the blood of the prophets.' Wherefore ye are witnesses against yourselves, that ye are the sons of them who killed the prophets. Fill up then the measure of your fathers. Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?"

Now those are not very loving words, we would say in the 20th Century, but they are the words of our Lord Jesus Christ. To keep men in spiritual darkness not permitting the glorious light of the gospel to penetrate the dark corners of their lives, neither living in it ourselves nor permitting others to do so, to enroll members in our denomination or sect arrogantly claiming that such membership is membership in the church of God, to overthrow the sense of proportion in spiritual things by reducing all things to the same level, to play at Christianity as if it were a game, to put appearance above the real thing, to praise the past and yet practice the sins of the past while

pretending to be horrified by them. For example, to praise the Reformers and yet live as unreformed, to build memorials to the great spiritual leaders of the past, and at the same time denigrate and vilify the simple Bible believing and living Christian. These are the things that cause a tempest of anger and wrath to sweep over the soul of Jesus and burst over the heads of his enemies in his devastating words, "Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?" These are words that are like lightning in their striking power and like thunder in their severity.

Paul's words in Romans chapter 2 are not so startling, but they are just as condemning. If the Lord were here today with Paul, they would be saying together, Luke chapter 6, verse 46, "Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" If the Lord were here, if the Apostle Paul were here, what would he say about that pious appearing Anglican, who with prayer book in hand, and proud words for that prayer book seldom offers an earnest petition of his own to the Triune God? What would he say about the Presbyterian brethren who, while glorying in their great tradition of the centrality of the word of God in witness and worship, build sanctuaries with divided chancels and in keeping with the implicit witness given, relegate his word to a place of decreasing significance in the life of the Kirk? And what of the independent brethren, such as we are, what would he say about us? Would he not have to say a great deal to us? For the living, spreading virus of hypocrisy knows no distinction of creed or denomination. What would say of the substitution, for example, of legalistic taboos for the living truth? What would he say of the pride that exists in our midst? I think he would have some very harsh words for us as well.

When I was living in Scotland some years ago, I noticed, as everyone does when he listens to a Scot speak, that he has a particular way of pronouncing the word "ch." When he speaks about lake, he uses the term "loch." And so, he gets that particular pronunciation of "ch" that is very much like the German "ch," in fact, there is some relationship between the two. And the Scots used to say there was a little village in Scotland, I've passed through that village, which they would ordinarily use in order to teach children and others, foreigners, how to pronounce "ch" properly, and it was the village of Ecclefechan. And they also said you have to stand at least three feet away from the person

[Laughter] who is beginning to pronounce that in order to be protected. But, Thomas Carlyle once said, referring to this thing that we are talking about, that what the village of Ecclefechan needed was a minister who knew God other than by hearsay. Well, Paul and our Lord unite in saying essentially the same thing. The apostle's words here concerning hypocrisy next to our Lord's are the strongest, I believe, in the whole of the word of God.

Now remember just for a moment, the apostle retracing the argument, the apostle is speaking of the guilt of the Gentiles and the guilt of the Jew in order to show that all men are under sin. The clue is chapter 3, verse 9, where he says at the conclusion of the preceding argument, "What then? Are we better than they? No, in no way: for we have before charged both Jews and Greeks, that they are all under sin." And then in verse 19 of this same 3rd chapter, he writes, "Now we know that whatsoever things the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God." So the apostle in this masterful argument is seeking to show that all men, Jew and Gentile, stand under sin.

Now what he says in the particular paragraph that we're looking at is that personal spiritual righteousness is to be desired as over against its deadly enemy, mechanical and sanctimonious practice of religious rites. Now the section that we're looking at is a section in which he sets forth the privileges of the Jews, the practices of the Jews, and finally, the position that the Jew stands before God with circumcision, but at the same time with essential disobedience to the Law of Moses. That's what we're going to be looking at. The Jews, as is so often the case among religious people, now true of us Gentiles, who make up largely the church of Jesus Christ, they were guilty of thinking too highly of themselves and too poorly of others.

It has always reminded me of the story of the very fashionable lady who went to a photographer to have her picture taken. She thought she was very good looking, but she was not. She said to the photographer, "Now, young man, I want you to do me justice." And he said, "Lady, what you need is not justice, but mercy." [Laughter] And so, these Jewish people thought too highly of themselves and they thought too poorly of others. And thinking because they had certain benefits

that came to be theirs by virtue of their election, and the fact that God had made them stewards of the manifold grace of God, they thought that that itself made them acceptable before the Lord God. And so, the apostle is speaking primarily to that attitude.

Now in verses 17 through 20 of Romans chapter 2, he first of all, mentions five privileges that were relative to the Jew himself and then five more privileges in verses 19 and 20, of privileges that particularly related to others. And I want to simply read through them, make a few comments, because they are very plain. What Paul is arguing is that the reality of possession is to be desired as over against the formality of profession. Now he says,

"But if thou art called a Jew, (Now that itself was a privilege that the Jewish man had, because the Jew came to be known as one who was the depository of the revelation of God: Jew, "Thou art called a Jew") and restest in the law, (That's his second privilege) and makest thy boast of God, (God gave them the law and they made their boast of the true God, Yahweh, as over against the gods of the heathen, Balaam and others) and knowest his will, (They knew his will because they had his will in their hands in the Scriptures) and approvest the things that are more excellent, (That is, they were able to appreciate moral distinctions, which others were unable to appreciate who did not have the Law of Moses, and the reason is given in verse 18 at the conclusion of that statement.) being instructed out of the law; And art confident (Now these are things that pertain to others, "And art confident") that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them who are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, who hast the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law."

Now these things, I say, have direct application to us in the Christian church today because God has, since the Day of Pentecost, been concerned with the ministry of the word through the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. The same essential spiritual principles and their application have been worked out in the Christian church down through the years to this present day. Hypocrisy is

one of the greatest of the sins of those who are religious people. It's one of the greatest sins to which we are exposed and, especially we, in a congregation such as this who have the idea that the word of God is proclaimed here.

Do you know that all of the words that we use make certain truth claims? Sometimes we don't realize that and don't realize the responsibility that we have. We say, "We are Christians." That conjures up a certain truth claim. We say that we open the Bible that, itself, is a truth claim. We say that we worship the true God. That, too, is a truth claim. We use the term "born-again" of Christians. Now why those two are put together is a puzzle, because if a person is born again, he's a Christian. If he is a Christian, he has been born-again. But, there are lots of people who use the term "Christian" who are obviously not born again, and that is why the term "born-again Christian" has come to be used. We even have political candidates who always want to make that known in our day now because it has certain political values, but those are truth claims, born-again. Denomination itself has a certain truth value as well. Sunday school, prayer meeting, all of these expressions that we use constantly, are loaded with truth claims and when we use them, we are making certain claims for ourselves.

And then in the latter part of that section, the apostle turns to the pride and arrogance of religious people. He's talking about the Jews, but we should make the application to ourselves and we should make the application, especially, to ourselves in Believers Chapel. Because we do think that we have the word of God opened in the ministry of the word, in the Sunday school, in the ministry of the word services, and in the Bible classes. But, when we do, it is so easy to become hypocritical and think that all of the truth lies with us and we have great responsibility to live up to the truth that we say that we have. The attitude of those the apostle is speaking about is like one of Shakespeare's characters in Julius Caesar who says of another, "I am Sir Oracle. When I open my lips, let no dog bark." Job described such people in his book and the irony of his words brings out the same truth as is expressed here in these words, Job said, "No doubt, but ye are the people, and wisdom shall die with you."

One often thinks that these words are very appropriate for us in our types of churches too. The Bible churches today, which make great claims for the ministry of word of God, are often filled with hypocrisy and arrogance and its something that we should pay a great deal of attention to. Paul Althaus, one of the German Commentators, has suggested that these phrases in verses 19 and 20, "Art confident that thou art a guide of the blind, a light of them who are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, who hast the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law," are phrases used by the Foreign Missions Committee of ancient Judaism. Well, you can imagine how they might be used of the Foreign Missions Committee of our Christian profession today.

Now the apostle, having set forth these ten privileges, five of which relate to themselves personally, and five of which are privileges as over against the poverty, spiritually of the Gentiles and the others, turns to their practices in verses 21 through 24 and he speaks in the tones of Nathan, who after David sinned said to him, "Thou art the man!" And he tries to impress upon his readers that no man is blessed because the light shines brightly around him. If you should attend Believers Chapel and if, let us assume for the moment that here in Believers Chapel we are being taught the word of God in relatively pure fashion at least, the fact that the word of God is proclaimed from this pulpit and from other teaching desks throughout this church in relative purity, does not mean that you thereby are blessed by it. The fact that the light should shine brightly around you does not mean that you have participated in that light. That is what Paul is speaking about here. Notice what he says. He says, "Thou therefore who teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? Thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal? Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery?"

One of the strangest things in our modern evangelicalism is the mixture that we see today between great profession and great failure in the practical life. Adultery, fornication, divorce, all of these things characterize, not the person who sits anonymously in the pews of our evangelical churches, but its leadership.

I don't know how true this is, but last night, I was in a meeting with some friends, just a home gathering of a few friends, and one of them is a minister in a large church. He said that he had recently spoken to an official of one of the Christian publishing houses and this man whom I know personally, but I did not hear this statement myself, said that in seventeen out of (I forgotten whether he said twenty-two or twenty-five) about twenty-five bestselling books written by Christians today, in the seventeen cases, those authors were involved in some immorality set forth specifically in the word of God; either divorce, or adultery, or something like that. Now that's a striking condemnation of evangelicalism if it is true. Now we know, of course, that we should not be surprised by that because the apostle speaks of that right here, "Thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal? Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery?" All of these are professions by individuals, but they're possession of the truth does not agree with their profession. Someone came to Charles Haddon Spurgeon one time and said, "The Bible is the light of the world." Mr. Spurgeon objected. He said, "No; how can the Bible be the light of the world when the world never reads the Bible?" You know, I have the feeling that many evangelicals never read the Bible except on Sunday morning when the minister opens the Bible and he carries his Bible to the church. When we stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ, and I'm speaking to myself as much or more than to you, we're going to be very, very chagrined to see how little we have really read the Bible. Mr. Spurgeon said, "How can it be when the world never reads the Bible?" "The Bible," he said, "is the light of the church. The Christian is the light of the world. The world reads the Christian, not the Bible." And I think he was true.

Paul talks about that here and says, in verse 24, in the climax, "For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you, as it is written." The Gentiles are not all that dumb even though they don't have the revelation of God, Paul says, they've reasoned properly. They've reasoned that people are like their God. Remember in the Old Testament in the Psalms, Psalm 115 and about verse 8, the Psalmist speaking about those who make idols said, "They who make them are like unto them." That is, those people who construct idols are like their idols because the kind of

God we have leaves its impress upon us. If we really do worship the God of the Bible and really worship him, then we will have some holiness of life for he is a holy God. Our God is reflected in our lives and if our lives are lives that are a constant contradiction of the word of God, it's plain we do not really have that God of the Bible that we say that we have.

There was a pope one time who said, "What profit this farce has brought us." And lest you think that that belongs to the Roman Catholics, that particular sin, a Protestant king of France gave up his own profession and cynically lost his soul in order to possess the city of Paris and said, "Paris is well worth amass." It is part of human nature to make great profession and not live up to it, and Paul is putting his finger here upon something that pertains to every one of us in this auditorium.

Now coming to the last few verses, he looks at the position of the Jew. And Paul is like a man who's pursuing the Jew and as Mr. Haldane says in his commentary on Romans, "He now pursues the Jew into his last retreat, and his last retreat is membership in the covenant community with its sign 'Circumcision.'" Now we, in the Christian Church, our last retreat, if we look at the whole of the Christian Church would be our particular relationship to the Lord God as signified in our baptism. And so, if we would transfer our thinking from circumcision to baptism, the same principle that Paul speaks about here would be applied to us. In other words, it's the old problem of the outward spirituality versus the inward spirituality.

Now in the Old Testament, Moses gave some hints and Jeremiah followed up with fuller language to the effect, that if a person who was circumcised did not live in a way that was in harmony with his circumcision, it would not be counted as circumcision. In other words, they were exhorted to circumcise not simply the flesh, but the heart. They really did not please the Lord simply by being circumcised. They had to be circumcised in heart. Now circumcision was the pulling away of the flesh and in the spiritual experience it signified the reliance upon the spirit rather than upon the flesh. It is the putting off of the flesh. And so, the prophets of the Old Testament and Moses said, "If you're going to be in right relationship to the Lord God, you must not simply be circumcised

physically, but you must also put off the flesh in your life." That is, rely upon the teaching of Holy Scripture and not rely upon the flesh.

Now remember circumcision was the sign that a person belonged to the Abrahamic covenant. Males were circumcised on the eighth day. Our Lord was circumcised on the eighth day and, thus, became outwardly a member of the covenant community. But, as so often the case, it's easy to live up to a rite and more difficult to live up to the reality of it. And so, ultimately, the rite came to be the important thing and the reality was overlooked. One of the reasons for this is that we're under the governance of the senses. It also saves the trouble of investigating our spiritual condition if we just are sure that we have lived up to a certain religious rite. The rites can be performed without necessarily renouncing the pleasurable vices that we are enjoying. We've even known people who say, "I'm a member of that church, because I can be a member of it and at the same time live the kind of life that I wish to live."

Now these are things that pertain to Israel and circumcision, but you can see immediately its application to us because we have a rite too. We have the rite of baptism, which is designed to be the sign and seal of the righteousness that we possess by faith, just as the child of Israel was circumcised the eighth day as a token, a sign of the righteousness which is by faith that marked him out from all other people, the Gentiles. So water baptism is designed to mark out a professing Christian as different from all other men.

Now when it is reality, that is when he has truly come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, it is a magnificent experience to be baptized in water. It's the way we confess our faith biblically. Not by holding up our hands in a meeting, not by coming down front, not by praying through. The way we profess our faith in New Testament times is to request baptism in water and that is to be the symbol, the expression, of a faith reality. We have truly turned from trust in ourselves and we have begun to trust by the grace of God and the blood shed on Calvary's cross for our sins, where there has been a change of life. God gives new life. But, when a person goes through the experience not having that spiritual experience, then all it is is a rite. It's just like circumcision became for so many of the

covenant community of the old covenant. It was just a physical experience. And so, Paul now will speak about that and, I say, "He will pursue the Jew into his last retreat."

Have you ever heard people respond to you when you say, "Are you a Christian?" They'll say, "Well, I was baptized by so and so, in such and such a church, ten years ago." That's his last retreat. That's the thing he's really holding onto. One of our political candidates says that he's holding onto that. In his own denomination, that is their view, that when a person is baptized in water, he's born-again. Now the Bible does not teach that when a person is baptized in water he is born-again. He may be. It's possible that as a person is baptized in water at that moment he comes to faith in Jesus Christ, but that probably is the exception rather than the rule. A person is ordinarily becomes a believer in the Lord Jesus through the preaching of the word. He is born-again. He's given new life and then he is baptized in profession of the faith that has come to him inwardly by the work of the Holy Spirit. So Paul is going to chase the Jew now into his last retreat, that circumcision or baptism. If you should happen to be in this congregation and really think that it is baptism by which you are saved.

The apostle makes three simple points. First of all, he says the rite without the reality is unrighteousness. Notice the 25th verse, "For circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the law: but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision." Someone might ask the question, "How is it possible for a person to keep the law?" The Greek word here is the word from which we get the English word practice. So if you should practice the law, circumcision verily profits. But how is a person able to practice the law? Well, to practice the law was to use the law in its proper way. The law was designed to show us we were sinners. That's why we were given the Ten Commandments. We were given the Ten Commandments in order to show us the standard of holiness that is representative of the Lord God. But anybody who looks at that knows immediately, "I cannot keep the law" and you must keep it perfectly if you are to be justified by what you do. So the law condemns. "By the law is the knowledge of sin," Paul will say in a few paragraphs on here in the Epistle to the Romans.

Then what does the law say? Well, the law then says that once we have been brought to the knowledge of our sin, then we must flee to the Lord God for grace. The prophet makes that plain in Deuteronomy chapter 30. Moses gives us the righteousness which is by faith there. So the Old Testament law taught not simply that men were condemned, but it also taught that men could only be justified by faith. So to keep the law is to keep the law in the sense in which it was intended by God, to bring us to the knowledge of our sin and then to cause us to flee to the Lord God to receive, in grace and mercy, the righteousness by faith. The sign is of value only if the covenant is kept.

One of the commentators has applied this to church membership and he has translated or retranslated this passage this way. He said, "Church membership indeed profiteth if thou be an obeyer of the gospel, but if thou be a refuser of the gospel walk, thy church membership has become non-church membership. If therefore a non-church member obey the gospel, shall not his non-church membership be reckoned for church membership? And shall not non-church members, if they obey the gospel, judge thee who with the letter and church membership art a refuser of a gospel walk? For he is not a Christian who is one outwardly nor is that church membership, which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Christian who is one inwardly and church membership is that of the heart, in the spirit, not in the letter whose praise is not of men, but of God."

Lúthi, the Swiss Bern reformed pastor that I have quoted from time to time in this series of studies, speaks about Christians whose baptism is only skin-deep. And he says, "Skin-deep Christians are particularly tough" and they are tough; those who have the idea that they are converted through the experience of some rite. The dollar mark is of no value if there is no reality there. To stamp ten with the sign gold does not make the ten gold and, on the other hand, if it is gold, it doesn't have to have any brand at all. Now the apostle goes on to speak about that. He says, "The reality without the rite is righteousness," in verses 26 and 27,

"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 fulfill the law, judge thee, who with the letter and circumcision dost transgress the law?"

So the person who has gold, even if it has no government stamp upon it, has gold, but the person who has a government stamp upon ten does not really have anything.

Now this was something that was different. The Jews had not thought of this and the apostle is the one who thinks of it. The Old Testament prophets had said, "Your circumcision must be of the heart." But, the apostle says, "Uncircumcision, if it keeps the law, is reckoned as circumcision." That is, as the true circumcision. Now the apostle could say this because he wrote in the time of the church. He could never have said this in the Old Testament times because it was important in the Old Testament, if a man came to faith, to be circumcised and become part of the believing community. But since the day of Calvary, when the veil of the temple was rent in twain, and the new age began, the age of the church, it was possible for him now to say that uncircumcision, if it should keep the righteousness of the law, shall be counted for circumcision. And finally in the last two verses, for we must hurry on, he says, "The reality is praised by God, but the rite is praised by men." Now the play on words I've spoken about "whose praise", whose Judaism is not of men, but of God. So he's talking here about the fact that outwardly the Jew looked very religious. He had his phylacteries, he had his fringes, he had his alms, he had his tithes, he did all of the things for a show. He had all of the marks of a religious man and, furthermore, he had certain passages from the word of God that spoke about most of these things.

Today, we're living in a different age and we have the Protestant Church and we have the Roman Catholic Church and we have great professions signified in outward things. We have large cathedrals, we have incense. We have even the ministers who are dressed in a different kind of garb that is very much or is probably a carry over from some of the garb of the Old Testament priests in Israel who carried on their ministry in garments of glory and beauty. And now we have men who

wear clerical garb. They wear a little round collar. Someone has said, "We must not ever think for one moment that that represents a slipped halo." It does not. And we, by this, tend to try to make up for the lack of spirituality that exists in our midst, because if we can get people thinking about the senses and about the emotions, then we will get good feelings when we see a religious pageant. And we tend, because we're not students of the word of God, we tend to confuse our emotions with the truth of the word of God. Truth does not begin with the emotions. Truth and the understanding of truth begins in the mind through the study of the word of God. And then looking at our experience in the light of the word, we will be brought to that which is true. But, if we reverse it and make our experience, our emotions, our feeling, the judge of what is true, then we will go astray always. And we have instances of this in all of our churches whether they be independent like this or denominational like others. I'm not seeking to attack one particular church because this is endemic to the whole of human nature.

So the apostle then, to conclude, speaks that one must possess the truth not simply profess it. Righteousness not the rite is that which pleases God. The Lord and the Apostle Paul are in hardy harmony. This is one of the great arguments against hypocrisy just as our Lord's was. Eight times the apostle speaks of hypocrisy in this section. That word itself came from a Greek actor who ordinarily put a mask on his face so that the word for hypocrisy is derived from a Greek word that means to answer from under; so to answer from under the mask. You have a mask on and that's the part that you play, but you yourself are a different person underneath. That is hypocrisy. We answer from under. We have a mask on our face, the livery of heaven, but underneath we are serving the devil. One thinks of the elder brother in the prodigal. It's a good thing when the prodigal came back, he saw the father first. If he had seen the elder brother, he might have wanted to go back to where he was because older, hypocritical brothers are not very happy people. There was a little boy one time who prayed, "Dear God, make all bad people good and all good people nice." [Laughter] Because we do have lots of religious people that are arrogant and proud and very difficult to live with. May God deliver us in Believers Chapel from arrogant, proud, hypocritical people. Now we

invite all the hypocrites in. That's where you ought to be, right here listening to the word of God. So don't say, "Believers Chapel's full of hypocrites and therefore I won't go to church there." That's where you ought to be with, with the rest of the hypocrites, trying to learn something from the word of God.

Well, the Apostle Paul and our Lord agree, I say, they agree in that woe of obstructionism, the fact that in our doctrines we often prevent people from coming to the truth; the woe of proselytism that the Lord gives in verse 15 of Matthew chapter 23. The woe of sophism, hairsplitting, that characterizes those who are hypocritical; they're not two kinds of truth. The woe of scrupulosity at the expense of morality; they are gigantic inconsistencies that are often at work in our midst. I always think of R. A. Torrey, one of the great evangelists of the 20th Century and Robert Dick Wilson, one of the great scholars, professor at Princeton Theological Seminary. They came together in a certain meeting. They both were evangelicals. Mr. Torrey was a large man with a large pot and Robert Dick Wilson, the great scholar, was a fine Christian man, but he had a love for cigars. And so, he smoked cigars. Well, they met in this meeting and Mr. Torrey walked over to Mr. Wilson and he said, looking at his cigar, he said, "I do not see how you're going to be able to face the Lord with that," pointing to the cigar. And so, Dr. Wilson looked at him and he said, "I don't see how you're going to be able to face the Lord with that," pointing to his pot. [Laughter] It's amazing the inconsistencies that we have in the Christian faith, the woe of hypocritical veneration of the past.

So we're going to have Reformation Sunday next week. This, of course, is not true here. It would be a great thing to do, of course, but we're going to have Reformation Sunday and Reformation Day. But Reformation Day is held in churches that no longer preach the doctrines of the Reformation. Martin Luther's teaching, or John Calvin's teaching, is largely unknown in those who celebrate Reformation Day and Reformation Sunday. "We honor the dead prophets, but we kill the living prophets," just as the Lord Jesus said. You garnish the tomb of the prophets, you make them all nice and pretty and you stand over against them and say, "Wasn't it wonderful that Isaiah was here? Wasn't it wonderful that Jeremiah was here? Wasn't it wonderful that Moses gave us such

great truth? And at the same time that they were saying these things, they were putting to death the last great prophet, our Lord Jesus Christ. So it is possible for us to praise the truth, but at the same time commit the error of disobedience to the word of God. And it is possible for us, in Believers Chapel, to extol the virtues of Martin Luther and John Calvin and the great truths that are represented by the Reformation, which we seek to preach here, and seek to preach in reality, but at the same time not really hold to the truths that these great men proclaimed.

What is the cure of externalism? Well, the Lord Jesus said, "Cleanse the inside of the platter." The cure of externalism is not outward reformation. The cure of externalism is inward regeneration. "Cleanse that which is within," or as Moses said, "The Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart." The cure for externalism is through the Holy Spirit, to come to recognize our sin, to recognize that Christ has died for sin, to acknowledge our sin before the Lord God, to as we stand before the Lord God, renounce all trust in human works and human endeavor, and flee to the cross of Christ, leaning on the mercy and grace of God represented in the blood that was shed there. And in doing that, the Lord thy God shall circumcise thine heart. It is the activity of God to save souls. It was the activity of God to circumcise the heart of the individual. May God help you to come. May you come to him who has offered an atoning sacrifice sufficient for all sinners. Come to him. Acknowledge your own sin of hypocrisy, and arrogance, and failure to obey the Scriptures, and lean upon our Lord Jesus Christ, receiving the inward transformation that means the change of life, the forgiveness of sins, and justification, and the possibility of a life pleasing to the Lord God. May God help you to come. Don't leave this auditorium not knowing the forgiveness of sins. Shall we stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] We are grateful to Thee, Lord, for these wonderful truths in the word of God. We know that we have failingly sought to proclaim the things that the apostle was speaking about, but deliver us, Lord, from hypocrisy, and arrogance, and pride...

[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]