

INTRODUCTION

Some of you know the pastor of First Baptist Church of Orlando, Florida, Dr. Jim Henry, is a good friend of mine. Not long after they had been in their new building, they had an unusual thing happen on a Sunday morning. They were through most of the worship service and the choir was singing and in the middle of the special music while Jim was sitting on the platform, a man came walking down the center aisle. He was dressed in an informal, casual golf shirt and was tanned and had bushy brown hair. He was just walking and looking around, taking it all in; just strolling down the center aisle. Jim said he just knew one of their reliable ushers would hop up and say, 'Hey, can I help you find a seat?', but nobody said a word until he walked all the way to the front. He was just standing down front looking around. Jim slipped out of his seat and went down there, and was talking to this guy while the choir is singing. He says, "I'm Jim Henry. I'm the pastor of this church. We are glad to have you here today. The man said, "Well, I'm glad to meet you. My name is Jesus Christ." Jim is a funny kind of guy and he said, "Well, Jesus, we're glad to have you here. We enjoy having you here in church. What are you doing here?" He said, "Well, I'm just checking things out." Jim said, "Well what do you think?" The guy said, "Not bad, not bad." Jim says, "Well, we'd sure love to have you sit and worship with us so come on and have a seat over here." The man said, "No, I can't do that. As you can imagine I've got a lot of things I have to check on so I'll see you. I need to run on." As the guy is walking away, he turns back and he said to Jim Henry, "By the way, it's going to be a cold winter this year." and he turned around and walked off. Jim said it blew his mind. Nobody knew what was going on until he told the story to them later, but he said "You know, it was the strangest thing. That was the coldest winter they had ever had."

Of course, he was not Jesus Christ, but have you ever wondered if the Lord Jesus could come in the flesh he's already here? He said, "Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am right there in the middle of you" but if he could come in here in the flesh and speak to us in an audible voice, what do you think he would say to us? Well, if you know what Jesus said in the Bible, you know he reserved the strongest words ever recorded for religious hypocrites, people who were very religious, but who did not have a relationship with God. I think that is probably the message he would bring to us today, and that is exactly the topic the apostle, Paul, is addressing here in Romans, chapter 2.

Romans, 2:17-24. Now you, if you call yourself a Jew; if you rely on the law and brag about your relationship to God; if you know his will and approve of what is superior because you are instructed by the law; if you are convinced that you are a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in the dark, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of infants, because you have in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth—you, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself? You who preach against stealing, do you steal? You who say that people should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who brag about the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law? As it is written: "God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you."

Then in verse 25 he starts talking about circumcision.

"Circumcision has value if you observe the law, but if you break the law, you have become as though you had not been circumcised. If those who are not circumcised keep the law's requirements, will they not be regarded as though they were circumcised? The one who is not circumcised physically and yet obeys the law will condemn you who, even though you have the written code and circumcision, are a lawbreaker."

He takes that first section to describe "empty religion." But then in verses 28 and 29 he tells us what the real thing is.

"A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly, and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men, but from God."

You have heard me talk many times about the big difference between religion and a relationship with God. I have told you many times religion never saved anybody, only a personal relationship with God can do that. In this passage of scripture, the apostle, Paul, is going to give us some marks of this dead, empty religion, and then he's going to give us the characteristics, the marks of a real relationship.

I. MARKS OF EMPTY RELIGION

In the church at Rome, there were two kinds of Christians: those who came from a Jewish background, and those who came from a Greek or Roman background. These Jewish Christians thought they were "better" than everybody else. He wrote to them saying, "If you think you can trust the Jewish religion to get you into heaven, you are wrong!" I don't know that there are too many people in this room who practice Judaism or who are biologically or religiously a Jew, but I'll tell you where the application is to us today. If someone asks you the question, "Are you a Christian?" and you answer, "Well I'm a Baptist" or "I'm a Presbyterian" or "I'm a Methodist," chances are you fall into the same trap the Jews did. If your first response is, "I'm a _____ and you give a denomination," you're in danger of putting your trust in the wrong thing. You say, "Well, how can you determine what this empty religion is?" Here are three marks.

1. Pride—Look at me!

You can always know it because these people are always characterized by pride. A religious person always says, "Look at me. Look at who I am. Look at what I have accomplished." Look again at verse 17. Paul says "Your problem is you brag about your relationship to God." Now, you may not say it verbally, but a religious person wants to be seen practicing their religion. It has very little to do with being seen by God. They want other people to see them practicing their religion. Have you ever gone to church hoping maybe somebody in the community would see you coming to church? Or, maybe, when you're in worship here, maybe there would be somebody who would see you are here in church today, and they may think a little bit more highly of you because you were in church? That's exactly the attitude the apostle, Paul, is talking about. "Look at me!" So many times people come to church to see or to be seen.

Maybe you heard the funny story about the little town where there was a poor family. The Baptist preacher kept visiting them saying, "Hey, we want you to come to our church." Finally, the father said, "Well, listen. We want to come to your church, but we are afraid what people might think of us. We don't have any nice clothes." The preacher says, "I'll take care of that." So, he took up a collection, and he bought a nice suit, tie and shoes for the husband, he bought a nice dress for the wife and clothes for the children. Then he said, "Now here you have plenty of good clothes. Now, no excuse, we'll see you in church this Sunday." Sunday rolled around and he looked out in the congregation and that family was not there. So, he was pretty upset about it. The next week he knocked on the family's door and he said, "Hey, what's the problem? We bought you all these clothes and you still didn't show up at church." The guy said, "Well, this is what happened. We dressed up in our nice, new "Sunday go to meeting" clothes, and we looked in the mirror. You know, we looked so nice, we decided to go to the Episcopal Church.

If you have ever had the thought run through your mind, "Boy, I hope somebody sees me going to church today," or "I think somebody thinks a little bit more highly of me because I am a Christian, or I claim to be a Christian," you could fall into the trap of "empty religion," pride, "Look at me!"

2. Hypocrisy—I know, but I don't have to obey!

The second mark is hypocrisy; its attitude is, "I know the truth, but I don't have to obey it." In verse 21, the apostle, Paul, gives three examples of this. He says, "You say don't steal, but you guys are stealing. That's hypocrisy. You say, don't commit adultery, but you are committing adultery yourself. You condemn idolatry, but you are stealing idols." That's hypocrisy. Now what's he talking about? How did the Jews steal? The same way people today steal from God. "If you are not giving your tithes and offerings, you are robbing God." (Malachi, 3:10) He says, "You preach, thou shalt not steal from God, but you turn around and steal from God all the time" He says, "You are a hypocrite." He says, "Number two, don't commit adultery, but you are committing adultery." Now, if you study the Pharisees' religion, they had what we would call "legal loopholes," allowing the Pharisees to do all kinds of immoral things outside the law. With one loophole, they could actually practice extra-marital sex if it was done in the right way. Paul says, "This is wrong. You are a hypocrite!" Number three: Idolatry. They didn't bow down before idols; instead, many Jewish merchants in Rome were making a thriving living from taking stolen idols and turning around and selling them to other Roman citizens. They were fencing stolen idols, and Paul says, "You are a hypocrite!"

Let me tell you what a hypocrite is. The word *hypocrite* comes from the Greek word *hupokrisis*; *hupo* means *under*, or literally, *from under*, and *krisis* means *to speak or to communicate*. The word *hypocrite* means *to speak from under*, meaning speaking from under a mask. The word hypocrite was a word used to describe the Greek and Roman dramas, because actors put on a mask and spoke from under it. Do you know what a "religious hypocrite" is? A religious hypocrite is someone who wears a mask. Those of you who know my testimony, know I am a recovering hypocrite. For many years when I was a teenager, I went to church, put on my little Christian mask, talked a certain way using all the spiritual terminology, sang in the choir, went to Sunday School, went to RAs and went to Sunday School Church Training Wednesday night, but

when I left the church building, I took off my mask and had a totally different vocabulary with my friends I played ball with, hung around a different crowd that did a lot of stupid things, but when I went back to church on Sunday, I put my little mask back on. That is a hypocrite.

If you do something similar, if you have a different vocabulary you use during the week that you don't use on Sunday, according to the Bible, you are a hypocrite. If you act a certain way on a Saturday night and would never act that way on a Sunday morning, you, my friend, fulfill the definition of what a hypocrite is. You know the truth you are just not doing it. James wrote, "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves, do what it says." (James, 1:22) And Paul said, "Because of that God's name is being blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you."

I think there are a lot of people right now in East Texas who are not Christians, and the reason they are not Christians is because they have looked at people who claim to be Christians. That's what Gandhi said. "I would have been a Christian except for Christians. People who say one thing, but live a totally different way." God's name is blasphemed because of our hypocritical living.

3. Trust in outward evidence

A third mark is to trust in outward evidence. A religious person loves the outer trappings of religion. They like all the ritual. They are into ritual, but not into redemption. They are into form, but not into faith. They are into a profession, but they are not into a possession. They like all the ritualistic parts of religion because it makes them feel good about themselves. They trust in outward evidence.

Look at verse 25. There are people who hear the word circumcision, and are clueless about what it means. When I was in the fifth grade, I was the Juniors in Sunday School. We had the roughest, most misbehaving class in the whole church. A football coach from the high school was our Sunday School teacher. He kept moving up with us every year because he was the only one mean enough to put up with us fifth grade guys. Well, the lesson on one particular Sunday was on circumcision. I guarantee you not a one of us in that room had any idea what circumcision was. Coach Strickland enlightened us. He said it was a surgery they performed on male babies. When the baby was eight days old, they cut off a covering of skin from the end of the male sex organ. When he said that, we acted like most fifth grade boys act when they heard that. We said, "No way! That's not what it means. That can't be in the Bible." I went home and I remember telling my daddy. I said, "Daddy, you won't believe what Coach Strickland told us. He is a dirty, old man. You won't believe what he told us that circumcision is in the Bible!" My dad said, "That's what it is, son," and my dad told me it was the mark of the covenant between Abraham and God, and it was a reminder to every Jewish male of their covenant relationship with God. But it became a "badge of pride," an outward mark they trusted, and they forgot about a relationship with God, and they only went through the outward motions of all these rituals and things.

In 1990, when I was still in Alabama, a national organization which selects two outstanding pastors from each state in America for a free trip to Israel made its annual selection. Well, it must

have been a bad year for Alabama pastors, because I got chosen that year, and 100 pastors of all different denominations went to Israel. Part of this cultural exchange is that we visited in the home of a Jewish family who were active in a synagogue in Jerusalem. We sat down and had a dialogue. I was amazed that these were people who were practicing Judaism, attended synagogue every shabat, but had absolutely no belief in God. They didn't believe in a personal God! What they believed in was a code of ethics, a system of behavior contained in the Old Testament and to them it was just a philosophy of life. I was blown away when they told me they had no relationship or any concept of a personal God.

I've been baptized!

When you are religious, you don't even need a God because you have all these other outward trappings. You say, "Well, we're not guilty of that, we believe in God." You know how we are guilty of this today? "Well, I've been baptized." You don't say, "I've been circumcised" you say "I've been baptized."

When somebody says, "Well, are you a Christian?" they may say, "Well, I'm a Baptist, I've been baptized." Baptism is a wonderful step of obedience every Christian ought to take but I have said before, "You can be baptized so many times in a farm pond where you know every catfish by its first name, and you still could be lost as a ball in high weeds!" *Baptism does not save you.* You can be dunked until you are waterlogged. That has nothing to do with salvation. It's an act of obedience. It's amazing how some people say, "Well, I've been baptized, or I take communion, I have received communion."

I've been listed!

Some say, "I've been listed" What? "Listed. I'm on the church roll. I'm on a list." I have here in my hand a computer printout of the over 9,000 members of Green Acres Baptist Church. You have heard me say before, "I don't think the FBI could find half of the people on this list." Do you think for one moment everybody whose name is on this list is going to go to heaven when they die? Some people think when we sing the hymn "When the Roll is Called up Yonder," they think it's talking about the church roll. It's not the church roll that's going to be called in heaven. It's not whether your name is written on the church roll. It's whether your name has been written in the Lamb's Book of Life in heaven. That only happens when you are born again.

It is a sad thing that there are thousands of people on this list who never darken the doors of this church, never give a penny, but when they die, it will be written in their obituary in the paper, they were a member of Green Acres Baptist Church. Some of them are sitting at home right now thinking, "That's enough. I'm a church member." That is a dangerous, false sense of security. Everybody ought to join the church. You ought to be involved in a local church, but friend, don't you think for one moment being listed on the church roll is the same thing as being saved. It's just like men saying, "I've been circumcised." It is an outward evidence.

I've been raised!

Some say, "Well, I've been raised I've been raised in a Christian home." Are you a Christian? "Well, sure I'm a Christian. My daddy was a deacon in a Baptist church. My granddaddy was a preacher in a Baptist church. My great granddaddy was one of the founders of Southwestern Seminary. Sure I'm a Christian"—as if your pedigree will get you into heaven. has no grandchildren, only children. It's not your denominational affiliation. It's not the Christian home you were born in. Somebody once said being born in a Christian home doesn't make you a Christian any more than being born in a garage makes you an automobile. It doesn't work that way.

I heard about a preacher one time who was raving about being a Baptist. He said, "Everybody in this room who's glad to be a Baptist, say "Amen!" Most people said, "Amen!" He said, "Anybody in this room who's not a Baptist, and proud of it say, "Amen." A little kid on the back row said, "Amen." The preacher thought he would really put the boy down. He said, "Son, what are you." He said, "I'm a Methodist, sir." The preacher said, "Tell us why are you a Methodist?" He said, "Because my momma and daddy are Methodists." The preacher knew he had him then, he was just going to refute him with logic that couldn't be resisted. He said, "Son, you tell everybody here. If your momma and daddy had been born idiots, what would that make you?" He said, "A Baptist, I guess." It's not whether you are born in a Christian home. It's not whether you were raised in a Baptist family, a Methodist family, a Presbyterian family. Those are outward evidences.

I've been busy!

Some say, "Well, I've been active in the church. I've been so busy. Certainly, I'm a Christian, because I've earned all of these Study Course Certificates. Certainly, I'm a Christian because I have sung in the choir for all these years. Certainly, I am a Christian because I have taught Sunday School, I have served soup at Good Sam, I've taken up the offering. I've done all these things. I *have* to be a Christian. Being busy has *nothing* to do with the Christian life. Once you are a Christian, you'll serve the Lord with gladness, but just being busy is no mark of spirituality. In fact, I came across a funny poem the other day about Southern Baptists. "Mary had a little lamb/It would have been a sheep/But it became a Southern Baptist/And died from lack of sleep."

We are so busy doing so many things, so many meetings, so many activities, but that has nothing to do with spirituality. I'm talking about religious people. I want to illustrate a religious attitude by a parable that Jesus told in Luke 18:9. I have not preached through the book of Luke here yet, but I know in a church I served in Alabama, I preached on this parable one time, and I set the people up. I have been known to do that a few times. I had a man in our church disguised as a bum walk in from the side door in front of everybody just as I am starting to preach. He was stumbling, wore an old hat, old smelly clothes and hadn't shaved in a couple of days. Nobody recognized him. I said, "Sir, just have a seat there, please. You're distracting everyone," and he just sat on the front pew. Then I proceeded to preach. "To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable. 'Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee.'" [a hyper-religious guy] "and the other a tax collector." [the epitome of sin] "The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself [He wasn't talking to God. He was talking to himself and for other people] "God. I thank you that I am not like ALL other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week. I give a

tenth of all I get...But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and he said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' Jesus said, "I tell you that this man [the tax collector] rather than the other "went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted"" The whole time I was preaching I watched people looking at this guy. I noticed many cut their eyes over at this guy on the front pew. Some people even moved away from him. Others sniffed, and moved a little further away from him, but I just preached along. At the end of the sermon, I brought him up on the platform. He took off his hat, and before long everybody recognized him as the vice president of one of the biggest banks in Birmingham. He was a deacon in our church. And I said, "If any of you for one moment looked at that guy and thought you were better than he is, you're exactly the target that Jesus was shooting at in this parable. A religious person always thinks how much better they are than other people. That's a religious person. They look for outward marks like that.

II. MARKS OF A TRUE RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

1. An inner transformation of the heart

There are three marks of a true relationship with God. First of all there must be an inner transformation of the heart. "No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart."

During World War II it was very important to the Nazis to determine who was a Jew and who was not. They wanted to purge Germany of the impure Jewish people. Those with any Jewish background, or those who practiced Judaism, were rounded up, imprinted, made to wear a blue star, arrested, sent to a concentration camp, and many were killed. It was important to determine who was really a Jew. They had a definition. Those of you who know what is happening in Israel today realize the most pressing national problem in Israel today is not the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. It is the conflict between secular and religious Jews today. That's what the is over. What constitutes a Jew in Israel today? They don't agree. They could save themselves a lot of problems by reading Romans 2:29, because being a Jew according to the Bible has nothing to do with what tribe you are from, your religious heritage or your background, someone who is chosen of God is somebody who has had an inner change of heart. That's nothing new. That's not just in the New Testament. Even Ezekiel wrote about it in the Old Testament. Look what God says in Ezekiel 36, "I will sprinkle clean water on you and you will be clean. I will cleanse you from all your impurities, from all your idols. I'll give you a new heart, and put a new spirit in you. I will remove from you your heart of stone, and give you a heart of flesh."

Salvation is not joining a church; it's not affiliating with a denomination; it's not filling out a card and it's not being baptized. Salvation is when you enter into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, and you experience an inner change of heart. You are circumcised in your heart, which means that old, dead, sinful portion of your life is cut away, and God gives you a new heart. Has that happened to you? You say, "Well, I don't really know about that." If you ask a Jewish man if he has been circumcised, he would say yes or no. It's not something you would say, "Well, I'm not sure." You'd *know*. If you have been born again if you have had a change of

heart, it's something that you know. You don't say, "Well, I think so, I hope so, maybe so," you say, "Yes, that happened!"

2. The purifying presence of the Holy Spirit

The second mark of a true relationship is the purifying presence of the Holy Spirit. Verse 29 says this inner circumcision of the heart is done "by the Spirit."

Look what Paul wrote in Romans 8:9. He says, "You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ." Now, I've been around for a long time in churches; been preaching for a long time, but if you were to ask me what is the biggest difference between religious people who are lost and born again Christians, it is this: you seldom, if ever, hear a religious person talk about the work of the Holy Spirit in their life. It's as if they can't even talk about it. It's as if they stumble over the words. They don't understand the presence and the reality of the "spirit filled" life. They never talk about it. You ask them about their spiritual relationship, and they talk about things like, "Well, I go to church, I have been baptized, I'm Baptist, I sing in the choir, I do all these things." But you never hear them talk about the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives. Whereas, people who have really entered into a relationship with God know that the Holy Spirit dwells within them, and they easily talk about the Spirit of Jesus who dwells within them.

I'm here to let you know that anything good in my life people see, is not David Dykes, it's the Spirit of Jesus Christ that lives inside of me. I understand, as Paul wrote, that my body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. I'm not my own. The Holy Spirit lives within me. This building is not a temple. This building is not a sanctuary. They are simply bricks, stone, mortar and steel. God has chosen a people, individuals to live in by the person of his Holy Spirit. That goes right over the heads of religious people. They are totally clueless when it comes to the presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives. Apply that to your own life. That's the second mark.

3. A burning desire to please God

A person who has a true relationship has a burning desire to please God a burning desire to please God is the third mark. "Such a person's praise is not from men, but from God." (verse 29) Who are you trying to please? If you are trying to please man it's going to be difficult at times to please God. But, if you are trying to please God, it's going to be impossible at times to please other people. Sometimes, people in the community say to me, "David, you have so many members down there at Green Acres Baptist Church, how in the world do you please them all?" I always laugh, and I say, "I don't! I can't even please my wife most of the time, much less all those thousands of people." I say, "I am committed to trying to please God, and God alone, and I figure if I please God, most of the people in the church are going to be happy too." If you please God, it doesn't matter *whom* you displease. But, if you *displease* God, it doesn't matter whom you please. Paul says you can't do both many times. "Am I now trying to win the approval of men or of God? One or the other, or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be the servant of Christ." (Galatians 1:10)

Here's your choice. You can be religious, ritualistic, a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof, and people around you will look at you, and they will say, "Oh, what a fine, religious, spiritual person he or she is." And you'll receive the praise of men. Or you can choose to live Godly, and one day the only applause you will hear will be the applause of the nail-scarred hands and he'll say, "Well, done good and faithful servant." Let's just boil it down. Who are you trying to please? Are you into a religion or are you into a relationship?

OUTLINE

I. MARKS OF EMPTY RELIGION:

1. Pride: Look at me!
2. Hypocrisy: I know, but I don't have to obey!

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. *James 1:22*

3. Trust in outward evidence:

I've been:

Baptized!

Listed!

Raised!

Busy!

(See Luke 18:9-14)

II. MARKS OF A TRUE RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD:

1. An inner transformation of the heart

"I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh." *Ezekiel 36:25-26*

2. The purifying presence of the Holy Spirit

You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. *Romans 8:9*

3. A burning desire to please God

Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ. *Galatians 1:10*



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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes