

# OUTWARD CONFORMITY AND INWARD REALITY

**Text: ROMANS 2:25-29**

## **INTRODUCTION:**

1. Back in the late 1800's, William Booth said, "In answer to your inquiry, I consider that the chief dangers which confront the coming century will be religion without the Holy Ghost, Christianity without Christ, forgiveness without repentance, salvation without regeneration, politics without God, and heaven without hell."
2. General Booth was warning of the increase in dead formalism -- a form of Christianity which wasn't genuine -- "religion without the Holy Ghost, Christianity without Christ, forgiveness without repentance, and salvation without regeneration."
3. The Jews in the apostle Paul's day (and in our day as well) put much emphasis on outward forms and ceremonies.
4. Acts 15:1 says, "And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved."
5. This error is dealt with in Paul's epistle to the Galatians.
6. Circumcision was a token of God's covenant relationship with Israel. It was much like a wedding ring is a token of marriage.
7. But a man could be circumcised and live like a heathen, just like a married man can wear a wedding ring and be an adulterer.
8. So circumcision in itself could not make a man a better Jew, any more than wearing a wedding ring makes a man a better husband, or getting baptized makes one a true Christian. In fact, many people think they're saved because they were baptized.
9. The word "uncircumcision" in the Bible (2:25-27) refers to Gentiles, those who were not circumcised because they were not part of the covenant God made with Israel.
10. Circumcision here in Romans 2 should be understood in the context of God's covenant with Israel. Paul is talking about the Jews (2:17ff).
11. Many Gentiles get circumcised today for health reasons or for other reasons, but this has nothing to do with what Paul is teaching here in Romans chapter 2.
12. Circumcision was a physical mark upon Abraham and his descendants (cf. Gen. 17:10-14; Joshua 5:1-9).
13. Circumcision was "a token of the covenant" between God and the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. In Genesis 17:11, God said to Abraham, "And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you."
14. This was a serious matter, so serious that if a man neglected to be circumcised, or neglected to have his son circumcised, "that soul shall be cut off" (Genesis 17:14).
15. We see this in the life of Moses. Moses was a Jew who married Zipporah, the daughter of Jethro, a Midianite. Moses was not careful to have his son circumcised; therefore God nearly killed him (Exodus 4:24-26).

16. The key verse in our passage is found at the end of Romans 2. We are going to look at what Paul calls the circumcision "of the heart" (2:29).

## **I. CIRCUMCISION OF THE HEART IS NOT MERE RELIGIOUS PROFESSION**

1. The Jews prided themselves on their circumcision, but Paul says they needed an "inward" circumcision (2:29). Circumcision of the heart (2:29) refers to regeneration. Most religious people, whether they are Jew or Gentile, have never been born again.
2. Many people profess to be religious, whether they be Jew or Muslim, Catholic or Protestant or Baptist or Adventist, JW, Mason, Mormon, etc.
3. This old world is full of religion. And this world always will be religious. The book of Revelation tells us that there will be plenty of religion during the tribulation period, and that the whole world will worship the antichrist and the devil (Revelation 13).
4. In Romans 2:17 and following, Paul is dealing specifically with the Jews. Many Jews are religious. In my neighborhood there are many religious Jews, and they have many conflicts with the liberal, irreligious Jews. And the same thing is happening today in Israel.
5. Before he was converted to Christ, Paul was a very religious Jew. He wrote in Philippians 3:5 -- "Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee."
6. But Paul was lost and on his way to hell. "But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ" (Phil. 3:7).

## **II. CIRCUMCISION OF THE HEART DOES NOT COME BY THE LAW (2:25-27).**

1. Romans 2:25 says, "But if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision." The proud Jew is brought down to the level of the despised Gentile.
2. "For there is no respect of persons with God" (Romans 2:11).
3. Paul goes on to say that keeping religious rules and rituals (such as circumcision) cannot save anyone (2:25). This is the great theme of Paul's epistle to the Galatians.
4. "Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace" (Galatians 5:2-4).
5. An application can be made here in regards to infant baptism. Millions of lost souls are on their way to hell believing they are Christian because some priest sprinkled them when they were babies. This is one of Satan's greatest deceptions.
6. Furthermore, many people were baptized by immersion, but they were never genuinely saved. They think they will go to heaven because they were baptized.
7. Any rite or ordinance can only be meaningful insofar as it is the outward expression of an inward experience. No outward ceremonial act can have any value if it is not related in some way to a genuine spiritual experience that is dynamic, personal, and scriptural.
8. To be circumcised in the heart means to be walking in the Spirit. Those who try to please God by keeping the law are not walking in the Spirit, but are walking in the flesh (Gal. 6:12-15; Phil. 3:2-7).

9. Paul says in Colossians 2:11, "In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ."
10. It is this contrast between the circumcision made with hands, and the circumcision made without hands that is one of the marks of Paul's epistles (cf. Ephesians 2:11).

### **III. CIRCUMCISION OF THE HEART IS AN INVISIBLE, SPIRITUAL MARK (2:28, 29).**

1. Circumcision is physical and visible. I was reading a book by Donald Grey Barnhouse, and he said that before WWII, Nazi soldiers would check men to see if they had been circumcised before killing them.
2. But circumcision also had a deeply spiritual meaning, which can be properly understood by comparing Scripture with Scripture (Rom. 2:29; cf. Deut. 10:16; 30:6; Jer. 9:26; Ezek. 44:7, 9).
3. It is this spiritual meaning that Paul deals with here and elsewhere (Rom. 2:29; cf. 4:9-12).
4. "In the spirit" (Romans 2:29) means the circumcision of the heart is performed by the Holy Spirit.
5. Second Corinthians 3:3 says, "Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart."
6. The word "Jew" comes from "Judah," which means "praise." The outwardly religious Jews looked for the praise of others. John 12:43 says, "For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God."
7. But the real meaning of Jew has reference to the praise of God, not the praise of men (Romans 2:29b).

### **CONCLUSION :**

1. Have you received this invisible "circumcision of the heart"?
2. I referred earlier to Dr. Barnhouse's comments on circumcision. His chapter on this passage is very good. He concludes with these words: "May we accept the knife that circumcises our hearts. May we be willing today to have God cut deep into our being."