

## Inward and Outward

“Are you enjoying yourself?” Karmen asked her friend, Adrian.

“This is nice,” Adrian, said guardedly. “The people are very nice. The food is good. The pastor is so funny.”

Adrian was visiting Karmen from out of town. She loved the Lord, and had been raised with a strict background. To name a few, Adrian had been raised to not go to the movies, play cards, or go to dances.

Adrian and Karmen had been friends since college and had been in theological conversations before about salvation, grace, and the law. Karmen’s mega church’s Friday Fun Night included a bevy of Bible games, arts and crafts, movies, and an assortment of entertainment, which included cards and dancing.

“Keeping rules can’t save you,” Karmen had said to Adrian earlier in the week, when they revisited the topic again. She had told her friend about the type of activities that would be at the Friday Fun Night. “We plan on just having some wholesome fun. God is most concerned with the heart. It’s the heart that needs to be broken, wholly submitted to Christ.”

Karmen was encouraged when Adrian seemed to be taking in more and resisting less.

“Are they playing the Cupid Shuffle?” asked Adrian.

“What do you know about it?” laughed Karmen.

“Well. I’ve seen it,” smiled Adrian.

“Come on, then,” Karmen said, getting up.

- 1.** *What does it mean to put your heart into what you do?*
- 2.** *How would you describe the relationship between the forgiveness we receive from God, our obedience to Him, and our motivations?*
- 3.** *Why is God more concerned with the reasons behind our obedience?*

**LESSON FOCUS:** The law does not save you—a circumcised heart does.

## Sinners—with or without the Law

*Romans 2:12-16, KJV*

12 For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law;

13 (For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified.

14 For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves:

15 Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another;)

16 In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel.

*Romans 2:12-16, NIV*

<sup>12</sup>All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law. <sup>13</sup>For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous. <sup>14</sup>(Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law. <sup>15</sup>They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them.) <sup>16</sup>This will take place on the day when God judges people's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares.

In Romans 1, Paul painted a grim picture of those who reject God—and then abruptly, at the start of chapter 2, he addressed the Jewish Christians in his audience: “You, therefore, have no excuse . . . for at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things” (Rom. 2:1). By verse 12, Paul had made clear that there was ultimately no difference between Jew and Gentile; all had failed God and would be subject to His judgment: “All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the

law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law." Knowledge of the law was no substitute for obedience; therefore, "it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous" (vs. 13).

Paul then made what must have been a startling declaration to his audience at that time: the Gentiles, who had no knowledge of the law, could be just as righteous as those Jews who had an exhaustive knowledge of the law. He said those who were obedient to what they did know, however great or small, would be the ones judged as righteous: "When Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law" (vs. 14). Although they did not have the law, the Gentiles did have "consciences . . . bearing witness." As they followed their consciences, "They show[ed] that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts" (vs. 15).

Paul underlined the seriousness of the situation in verse 16: "This will take place on the day when God judges people's secrets through Jesus Christ." One day every action, every thought, will be judged by Jesus Himself, the only one who made forgiveness for those sins possible. Paul added a revealing tag to this statement: "as *my gospel* declares" (emphasis added). Paul was not just preaching to others; he was staking his own life on what he declared.

**4.** *What did Paul say to his Roman audience about God's judgment?*

**5.** *Conversely, who did Paul say was righteous before God?*

**6.** *How did Paul emphasize what he preached in verse 16?*

## The Law Reveals the Believer

*Romans 2:17-24, 28-29, KJV*

17 Behold, thou art called a Jew, and retest in the law, and makest thy boast of God,

*Romans 2:17-24, 28-29, NIV*

<sup>17</sup>Now you, if you call yourself a Jew; if you rely on the law and boast in

18 And knowest his will, and approvest the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law;

19 And art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness,

20 An instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which hast the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law.

21 Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal?

22 Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege?

23 Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God?

24 For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you, as it is written. . . .

28 For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh:

29 But he is a Jew, which 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.

God; <sup>18</sup>if you know his will and approve of what is superior because you are instructed by the law; <sup>19</sup>if you are convinced that you are a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in the dark, <sup>20</sup>an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of little children, because you have in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth— <sup>21</sup>you, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself? You who preach against stealing, do you steal? <sup>22</sup>You who say that people should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? <sup>23</sup>You who boast in the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law? <sup>24</sup>As it is written: "God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you." . . . <sup>28</sup>A person is not a Jew who is one only outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. <sup>29</sup>No, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a person's praise is not from other people, but from God.

Paul now locked in specifically to the Jewish portion of his audience. He began by openly questioning their assumptions about themselves. He included several “if” statements in verses 17-20, setting them up for the case he would present against them. Not all the Roman Jews fell into these categories, but clearly many of them still based their salvation on their knowledge of God’s law. Thus, Paul created an image of those proud Jews who relied on the law and “boast in God” (vs. 17), and who were convinced they could teach and guide others (vss. 19-20). And to some degree they were justified, “because you have in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth” (vs. 20). And yet, they had forgotten to teach themselves.

Paul then posed a series of rhetorical questions to his audience: “If” they were all the things they had supposed themselves to be, did they follow the law? Did they teach themselves? Did they steal? Did they commit adultery? Did they hate idols, yet rob God’s temples? Did they dishonor God by breaking the very law they preached?

Having made his case against those who tried to justify themselves by the law, Paul returned to his central argument: it was not people’s religious background or nationality, a knowledge of the law, nor physical circumcision that saved them or made them righteous. The true Jew—and any true follower of God—“is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code” (vs. 29). We must be careful today not to feel like those first-century Jews. Our good works of going to church, being baptized, and so on do not substitute for a heart truly devoted to the Lord.

**7.** *Who did Paul address in verses 17-20? What did he say about how they saw themselves?*

**8.** *What did Paul then accuse these people of in verses 21-24?*

**9.** *Who did Paul say were the true followers of God in verses 28-29?*

## A Heart of Obedience

In our lesson passage, Paul separates knowledge and outward adherence to the law from righteousness and circumcision of the heart. Many Christians have a heart of law, judging others and at the same time judging themselves as superior, one of the “saved.”

When a new youth pastor was introduced to the congregation, Scott wondered if the best process had been followed. Rumor had it that the previous youth pastor had “sinned” and been asked to leave the church immediately. Scott did not condone sin, and it could reflect negatively on the congregation if the youth pastor was allowed to stay, but had the board handled the problem correctly and lovingly? Handling the situation wrong could also reflect poorly on the church. Had there been a rush to judgment?

Non-believers see right through any judgmental attitudes. That’s one reason Paul cautioned his audience against judgment and boasting in keeping the law, lest we turn people away from Jesus.

Knowledge of right and wrong or keeping God’s commands isn’t all God looks for. Paul implied we should look not only to God’s Word, but also to His Spirit who writes the law on our hearts, to determine what God requires.

Paul asked questions to challenge his audience to ask themselves if they truly followed the law. In the same way, Jesus also challenged those who claimed to be righteous to examine their hearts. A heart of obedience—from loving motives—is what matters. Our most important goal and focus should be maintaining a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

**10.** *In what ways do believers often judge non-believers?*

**11.** *How might our efforts to follow God’s commands turn people away from Jesus?*

**12.** *What are the keys to becoming a true follower of God?*

## Spiritual Circumcision Leads to Obedience

Circumcision of the heart refers to allowing God to make a place for Himself in our hearts. When we accept His grace, forgiveness, and Jesus' redemptive work on the Cross, our motivations to obey Him change as we seek to follow Him in a personal love relationship.

► *Reflect on the following questions: Is your motivation to obey God driven more by the Holy Spirit or the law? How can you be more heart-driven this coming week?*

### KEY VERSE

But he is a Jew, which 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. —Romans 2:29, KJV

No, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a person's praise is not from other people, but from God.

—Romans 2:29, NIV

### DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

#### Week of October 2 through October 8

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross devotionals* on these passages.)

- Mon.** Deuteronomy 5:1-15—Living Before God.
- Tue.** Deuteronomy 5:16-22—Living with Others.
- Wed.** Romans 7:14-25—Who Will Rescue Me?
- Thu.** Jeremiah 7:1-15—God Sees Human Intentions.
- Fri.** Romans 6:1-12—Dead to Sin; Alive in Christ.
- Sat.** Romans 6:13-23—Present Your Bodies to God.
- Sun.** Romans 7:1-12—Dead to the Law through Christ.