

September 24, 2023

"Inward and Outward"
Lesson 5

Romans 2:12-24, 28-29

Intro

In today's text, we have shifted from gospels covering Jesus' life and ministry on earth to a letter Paul wrote years later to disciples of Jesus in Rome. As Paul addressed questions and issues that arose among these people, the Holy Spirit was also inspiring him to provide instruction for disciples like us who get to learn from reading the same words. The subject at hand is the tension between the Law of Moses, given to Israel when God led them out of Egypt and salvation by faith made possible through Jesus' death and victory over death. Some of the Jewish Christians in Rome and other places seemed to think their background made them superior to gentile Christians. Some taught that these gentiles needed to convert to Judaism in addition to obeying the gospel. Paul addresses this in Romans chapter 2.

Read Romans 2:12-16

1. vs. 12: Different situations, same result
The people who were "apart from the law" weren't part of God's covenant with Israel, so they weren't God's people. Before Jesus, they had no remedy for their sin.
Those who were "under the law" still sinned, and that sin was rightly judged by the law.
2. vs. 13: Hearing versus doing
The people under the law may have heard it, but they weren't obeying completely.
Because of that, they aren't right (righteous) in God's eyes.
3. vs. 14-15: Inherent law
Even people who didn't hear God's law naturally knew some things were right and others were wrong.
Being "apart from the law" didn't prevent them from sometimes getting it right. But they also didn't do so perfectly
It did demonstrate that God's law was naturally right. It provided evidence that confirmed what God had revealed to Israel through Moses.
4. vs. 16: It will get sorted out
Jesus will judge rightly how each person squares up with God's standards, whether they were under the law or not.

Read Romans 2:17-24

1. vs. 17-18: Law keepers?
Paul addresses those who identify as keeping the Law.
They pride themselves on being "God's People"
They point to the Law as being the answer to what is right or superior.
Since they know the law, they feel like they are superior as well.
2. vs. 19-20: Lack of introspection

They weren't content to know and keep the Law themselves. They wanted to be seen as teachers by others, so much that this was their main focus - compelling others to follow the Law.

They saw themselves as rightful guides to everyone else

3. vs. 21-22: Doing well?

They teach others, but do they apply the lessons to themselves?

The first questions probably leave them feeling pretty good. They don't do the really bad things, at least that's what they tell themselves.

4. vs. 23-24: The rest of the story

The truth is that they aren't keeping the Law completely. Anything less is a violation and a dishonor to God.

This wasn't a new problem (Isaiah 52:5, Ezekiel 36:20-22)

It is, in fact, an inherent flaw in the law keeping (as a priority) mindset.

Read Romans 2:29-29

1. vs. 28: Outward appearance

The idea of Jew here is used referring to those who are "God's people."

That isn't just about heritage or the circumcision required by the Law.

It's more about the heart and the behavior

Even the Law was really about the heart, but they had missed the point. (2 Chronicles 16:9).

2. vs 29: Inner cleanness

In the Christian age, law keeping isn't what identifies a person as "God's people."

Those who are doing it right are focused on the heart and pleasing God, rather than being patted on the back by others.

Application: Jewish Christians who were getting gentiles to convert to Judaism as part of being a Christian would have something to brag about to their fellow Jews. It likely even made them acceptable to the other Jews. But that whole thought process ignores the power and importance of Jesus' sacrifice. The same sort of danger exists for us today. Replace "Jew" with growing up in a faithful church. Folks may know a lot about Scripture, but the real question is do they follow it completely. It's not just about knowing, but about doing. None of us follows perfectly, and not everything is equally weighted. God is most concerned with souls. When our focus drifts elsewhere, that's a problem. When we start thinking less of someone else because of our past compared to theirs, that's a problem. Fortunately, we can all seek God's forgiveness and grace (and we all need to).

Prayer:

Wonderful Father, thank you for your patience with us. We shouldn't compare ourselves with others, but sometimes we still do. Thank you for the sacrifice Jesus made to pay the penalty for all of our sins. Help us to remember to be just as gracious and merciful to others around us. Help us to see and make the most of the opportunities you give us to share the hope You have given us. In Jesus' precious name we pray, amen.