

A Changed Heart

Romans 2:12-29

Today's Journey

2:12-13	God is Not Cool with Hypocrisy.
2:14-16	Concerning The Spiritually Underprivileged
2:17-24	Concerning The Spiritually Privileged
2:25-29	It's All About The Heart

2:12-13 — God is Not Cool with Hypocrisy.

Law = Torah (Moses; first five books of the OT); central to Jewish identity

"Doers of THE LAW"?

Q: But is Paul contradicting himself? Are some people justified by following the Law?

A: First, Paul is clear that all believers — Jew and Gentile — are made right with God by faith in Jesus. Maybe he has believers in mind who imperfectly but genuinely follow the way of Jesus?

We just don't know for sure. What we do know is that:

1. We are justified by faith in Jesus;
2. Works evidence true faith;
3. God is not cool with hypocrisy or cheap grace, and, finally;
4. We need to learn to be okay with tension and mystery in the Bible. Because there's a lot of it.

Maybe the text will help us discover Paul's meaning as we delve further...

2:14-16 — Concerning the Spiritually Underprivileged

Two wrong interpretations:

1. Some Gentiles have a good nature and can be made right with God apart from Christ. Problem: **Romans 3:22-24**
2. Gentiles who haven't heard of Christ but somehow prove by their good lives that that they would have believed if they heard the gospel.

Remember the context: Doers of the Law, not hearers only.

1. Believing Gentiles?: "Law written on their hearts" echoes new covenant language (Jer. 31:33). Also, Paul's reference to the work of the Spirit in vs 29. Problem: believers don't obey the law "by nature" but by Grace.
2. A Repudiation to religious hypocrisy?
3. "For when Gentiles who do not have the law, by nature..."
 - No punctuation in Greek: "do not have the law by nature" rather than "do not have the law, by nature do..."
 - Maybe believing Gentiles who, after coming to Christ, excel in good works despite not having the advantage of having grown up with Scripture
 - If correct, this supports 13b — that lacking privileges their hearts are changed and they go God's way.

Point:

- Paul shames the judgmental self-righteous by highlighting godless people who do good (this is true today!)

- God prefers a stumbling disciple who's learning how to live in God's kingdom to a stodgy bible pro who thinks he's got it figured out. When it's all said and done, it's those who have the Spirit within and are putting one foot in front of the other in whom God delights.

2:17-24 — Concerning the Spiritually Privileged

Verses 17-18: The privileges of being a Jew

- Possess the Law (the revelation of God's will);
- Therefore, know God's will and approve of what is excellent because of Bible knowledge (unlike 1:32).

Verses 19-20: Able to instruct others

- See yourself as absolutely theologically right and therefore show the way to the "blind" & those in darkness;
- Instructor of the foolish, teacher of children (those who know nothing)
- Sit in superior judgment over "wrong" people

Verses 21-22: Three Examples of Inconsistency

- 8th Commandment: Stealing
- 7th Commandment: Adultery
- 1st/8th Commandment: Idolatry/robbing temples
- Note: Apparently, Paul had some specific insights into some of the problems of this church on which he doesn't elaborate here. But the way they live is a repudiation of what they say they believe.

Verses 23-24: God is Despised Because of Disobedient Believers

- Isaiah 52:5: "...and continually all the day my name is despised." (Reference to God's people conquered and exiled who, though they had the law, God evaluated as not knowing his name.)

Challenge:

Believers often lament over the world's hardening toward the church...

2:25-29 — It's All About the Heart!

Verses 25-27: Circumcision

- A ritual practice that set apart God's people from other ethnic groups and nations
- Became a shorthand for "being a Jew, having the Law"
- Assumption: We should assume that those with the outward mark of circumcision were spiritually enlightened in a way others weren't.
- Disobedience overrides your outward mark
- In contrast, those without the mark who obey God are God's true followers

Verses 28-29: Clearing Things Up

- A new kind of circumcision — that of the heart, performed by the Spirit...
1. A circumcision performed by the Spirit within, not by a person
 2. A circumcision that is not achieved by following the Law

This points backwards to...

- v 25: "obey the law"
- v 26: "keeps the precepts of the law" (or keep the law's requirements)
- v 27: "keeps the law"

Conclusion

- It appears that “keeping the law” doesn’t refer to sinless perfection, but to authentic Christianity
- Paul seems to contrast the work of the Spirit with the written code of the law (“the letter”)
- For the unconverted, the law remains outside of them — true, but dead letters (dead = not shaping them)
- For the converted, those same moral truths come inside the heart by the work of the Spirit
- A primary trait of the converted heart is that it grows to live for the praise of God and gradually no longer lives for the praise of people.
- The question is not whether the law is good or bad. The question is has the Spirit applied the truth of the law to your heart?