

Heart Surgery

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In Romans 2:28-29, the apostle Paul commented, “For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.” The Jews surely thought themselves a holy people before God. No doubt they thought they deserved their privileges because it was their birthright. Yet, no matter how they viewed themselves, they were unthankful, rebellious, and their conduct was unrighteous. Paul’s point - even the Jews of the Old Testament had to have their heart into being a child of God. It was not merely an outward name that made them God’s people.

Today, we have for a long time opposed the notion of “spirit” in religion because of the popular concept that ignores the actual obedience to God’s commands. And, in our opposition to such thinking, we may have forgotten that true obedience comes from the heart. Paul was not saying that there was no such thing as an outward Jew (in name) but that God’s approval does not depend on an outward appearance.

Someone once asked the question, “Do we think he is a Christian who wears the name?” Many think that’s all there is to it and once those “steps” of salvation have been met, the name sticks. We could also ask ourselves, is this a church of Christ because of the name on the building? Is it one because it is socially and historically associated with a movement? Christians must remember that they do not belong to Christ because they sit in a seat in a church building. They sit in a seat because they belong to Christ.

The name “Christian” describes what we are. If not, it is worn hypocritically. The name “Christian” simply means “one like Christ.” The person wearing the name has determined “in their heart” to take on the qualities that Jesus showed us. Christians no longer live to themselves but mirror the life and character Jesus Christ showed (Gal. 2:20.) But if we think that having a baptismal certificate offers proof that one is a Christian, we make the same mistake that the Jews who thought outward marks were enough made.

We could preach lessons and write articles all we want about the letter of the law. Or we could do the same about the “spirit.” But neither of these stands alone. An attitude that will not obey God is wrong. But an outward conforming to commands is not an “obedience of faith” (Rom. 1:5; 16:26.)

And yet, if the heart is taken out of the equation, not much is left. Somehow, someday, we must stress the character of a Christian for in so doing, we talk of the church’s character. More and more it seems that the heart is missing from Christians and that is sad. All that is left is a club membership in a congregation. Christians of the first century loved the Lord with all their heart. He was the center of their thoughts, in every conversation, and behind every deed of theirs. We can do no less today if we ever expect to see the inside of God’s heaven. True Christianity is not just outward association with something - it is a demonstration of character that is ALL about the Lord. It won’t hurt for every Christian to take a long look at their heart before God and do some surgery if needed.