

## Change From the Heart

The other day we were driving down the highway, creeping along at the speed of 65 miles per hour mandated by the law on this particular road. Cars, trucks and motorcycles whizzed by at considerably higher speeds. Suddenly, pairs of red tail lights beamed across the horizon as those drivers slowed their pace. Before we could catch up to the pack, we saw the various vehicles once again resume their breakneck speed. What was it that caused them all to go from fast to slow to fast again? If you've driven for any period of time, you know exactly what happened. A police officer had positioned his car alongside the roadway and had his trusty radar gun pointed in our direction. For a brief moment in time, most, if not all, of the drivers on that road obeyed the speed limit. For most, if not all, of those drivers, their decision to abide by the law lasted only as long as they thought they were going to be caught.

Would you call what those drivers did real, sincere change from the heart? Did their consciences suddenly strike them and convict them that they were disobeying the law and that they should slow down and never speed again? Apparently not, because as soon as they felt they were out of the vision of the police officer and the sweep of his radar gun, they went right back to their excessive speeds. More than likely, had another officer been a few miles down the road with his radar gun, the scene would have repeated itself.

The New Testament teaches that becoming a Christian demands repentance or change. Jesus said, "I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." (Luke 13:3,5). On the day of Pentecost, Peter instructed, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." (Acts 2:38). God "now commandeth all men every where to repent." (Acts 17:30). Romans, chapter six addresses this change in greater detail. Men and women, believing that Jesus is Christ, must change from their worldly lives to lives of righteousness, and then confess that Jesus is Christ (Romans 10:9,10) and be immersed into Christ for the forgiveness of sins (Romans 6:4).

Once we obey the Gospel, even though we are new creatures, free from past sins through the blood of Christ (II Corinthians 5:17), we are not done with our transformation. Paul urged this continuous change in Romans 12:1-2. Peter indicated that our lives as Christians should be drastically different than the lives we lived when we were in the world (I Peter 4:1-4). The Christian walk is one of progress toward greater Christ-likeness, deeper righteousness and stronger faith. Our change must never stop, lest we find ourselves changing back into what we used to be.

The question now is, "Do we only show a change when someone else is watching?" For instance, are we only aware of our language, our personal habits, etc. when we're around the preacher or other Christians? When I was preaching full-time, it used to irritate me when I'd see a group of people at a store, the ball field or any other public place and immediately hear, "Be quiet. Here comes the preacher." When I'd hear that I would say, "Folks, God has already heard everything you've said." When someone would apologize to me for using a bad word, I'd say, "You're apologizing to the wrong one!"

Change from the heart, the repentance that God demands before He will add a person to His church and that which He continually demands from those who claim to belong to Him, is that which shows itself around the clock, no matter who is or who is not watching. That change reflects the attitude of one who has set his "affection on things above" (Colossians 3:2), who realizes that his "conversation is in heaven" (Philippians 3:20) and who, above all else, wants to go to heaven (II Timothy 4:7-8).

How committed are we to change? If that change does not come from the heart then we will find ourselves living lives of hypocrisy, following one set of rules among one group and another set among another group. Not only will this hinder us from influencing others for Christ, it will dramatically stunt our spiritual growth and impede our progress toward the mansion above. Will we change because God requires our change and because we love Him and want to please Him, or will we "change" just when we "have to" and just for show?