

# The Outward and the Inward Man

M. W. Bassford, 3-10-13

As most of you are aware, several weeks ago was the yearly celebration of the Grammy Awards. Normally, I have about as much use for pop music and pop musicians as Josef Stalin had for free speech, but even in my celebrity-free bubble, I was forced to take some notice of the event. I would go around to various news sites on the Internet, and there would be pictures of all of these glamorous stars, dressed to the nines for the big event.

Now, that's all well and good, I guess, but as I was scrolling past the pictures to get to the articles on politics and finance and all the stuff that I do care about, I was struck by a thought. Here are all of these beautiful pictures of beautiful people that fascinate hundreds of millions. How many of us would still be interested in those pictures if the photographers on the red carpet were taking pictures of what was inside those people instead of what was outside? What if the glamor shots revealed the drug and alcohol abuse, the affairs, the multiple divorces, and above all, the worship of the self? The bodies that we can see are beautiful, but I don't think the souls that we can't see would be.

I say this not to take shots at the moral bankruptcy of our entertainers, although if anyone has ever deserved that, it would be they. Instead, I say it to call attention to ourselves. If someone took a red-carpet photo of our soul, what would we look like? What would it say about us? Let's turn our attention to the outward and the inward man.

## Comparing the Two

For starters, let's examine what the word has to say about the differences between the outward man and the inward man. These differences begin with **TWO ORIGINS**. This is described in Genesis 2:7. There it is. That is when both the outward man and the inward man began. The outward man was fashioned by God out of dust. I remember reading several years ago that if the human body is reduced to its core elements, calcium, carbon, iron, and so on, that each one of us has about \$1.68 of raw materials in us. Taking inflation into account, let's bump that up to \$2. That's the value of our outward man. Sure, God did a great job of arranging the \$2 worth of stuff, but that's all we are, and the day will come when God will obliterate even the very elements that compose our bodies.

On the other hand, though, our inward man originates from nothing less than the breath of God, the divine spirit that the Creator breathed into the nostrils of Adam to give him life. None of us have ever seen that spiritual substance. None of us can lay a finger on it, but it comprises nothing less than the essence of God Himself. It is worth more than the world and everything in it, and not even the destruction of the universe will destroy our inward selves.

As our inward and our outward man coexist in our lives, they obey **TWO LAWS**. Paul explains this struggle in Romans 7:22-23. Because our inward selves came from God, they naturally yearn for the things of God. In my heart of hearts, I love God, I love His law, and I yearn for nothing more than to obey Him and be with Him forever.

I say that, I believe it to be true, and yet I know full well that my life doesn't line up with the ambition I express. All too often, I live as though I don't love God, as though I have no concern for His law, and as though I am utterly indifferent to the prospect of spending eternity with Him in heaven. What gives? Am I a hypocrite?

Paul explains here that no, I am not a hypocrite, and indeed that every Christian who truly loves God yet struggles to obey Him is not a hypocrite. The problem is that I don't just have an inward man. I have an outward man too, and just like my inward man longs for the things of its origin, so too does my outward man. My flesh loves the things of this world and has no concern for any law but the law of the jungle. It constantly struggles to take control of my life from my inward man. Sometimes my inward man wins the battle, but sometimes it doesn't, and when it doesn't, I sin. This conflict exists in each one of us, and it will never conclude until either we die or the Lord returns.

The Scripture also reveals that God has **TWO PERSPECTIVES** on the two halves of our being. This is never better expressed than in His words in 1 Samuel 16:6-7. Like so many passages of Scripture, this one shows that in the thousands of years since the writing of the Bible, people haven't changed a bit. Samuel has just witnessed the spiritual failure of King Saul, a man who was outwardly impressive, yet inwardly flawed. At God's direction, Samuel has come to the household of Jesse to appoint a new king from among Jesse's sons. Samuel sees Jesse's son Eliab, is struck by his kingly appearance, and is convinced that because Eliab looks the part, he will be able to act the part. This is terribly ironic. It shows that even a wise old prophet like Samuel hadn't learned from Saul's disaster not to judge by appearances.

If we're honest, we'll admit that it's easy for us to fall into the same trap. Studies have shown that the average CEO is much taller than average, because people assume that if a man looks like a leader, he is actually capable of being a leader. We make that mistake, but God doesn't. God doesn't look at our outward man and assume that we're competent or virtuous or pious or anything. The Lord doesn't see as man sees. The Lord looks at the heart. He's concerned not with what we look like, but who we are. Our raw materials don't impress Him, no matter how aesthetically they may be arranged. Instead, God cares what we've done with our souls, and only the heart set on Him pleases Him.

Finally, of course, our outward man and our inward man are bound for **TWO FATES**. Paul emphasizes this in 2 Corinthians 4:16, 18. When Paul talks about his outward man decaying daily, I'm sure he wasn't exaggerating. In the

service of Jesus, the apostle faced all kinds of abuse. After all the floggings and stonings and shipwrecks, Paul was a messed-up guy, and I'm sure he looked like it. However, this daily decay isn't something that we face only when we face physical persecution. Instead, it is a constant reality for all of us. Every day, each one of us is one day closer to the grave, and the closer we get, the more the process accelerates. James Hensley wasn't always confined to a wheelchair, groaning in pain, requiring a bushel of pills every day to barely function. Virginia Childers wasn't always a wreck of a woman, unable to care for herself, unable to speak. Both of them used to be like us—strong, healthy, able to assemble with the saints on the Lord's day, able to do as they pleased. They were like us, and we will be like them. Their suffering, their decay, is a grim prophecy of what each one of us will one day face. That's what happens to the outward man, and one day the outward man that all of us have will die and be reduced back to our two bucks' worth of raw materials.

The inward man, though, is bound for an entirely different fate. When finally our wrecked outward man breathes its last, that will not destroy the spirit that is imprisoned within. It will only free it. That spirit will wing its way to paradise or to torment, depending, and there it will await the resurrection of the dead, a reunion with a transformed, spiritual body that will last forever. The inward man is eternal.

## Jesus' Perspective

Next, in preparation for the Lord's Supper, we're going to contemplate Jesus' perspective on the outward and the inward man. This perspective is first revealed by **HIS FORM**. The best physical description we have of Jesus was actually written 700 years before He came to earth, in Isaiah 5:32. Most of us have seen this text before, but there's more to it than a glimpse of what Jesus looked like. Unlike us, Jesus pre-existed His earthly body. He could have come in any form that He chose. If Jesus had wanted to be 6'5", with features like a soap opera star and a build like an NFL linebacker, He could have looked like that. Instead, when He put on flesh, He chose a form that wouldn't occasion comment if He appeared in our assembly this morning. In doing so, He made a very clear statement. To Jesus, the outward man simply wasn't that important. He could look like Average Joe and still have everything that mattered.

Jesus also revealed His thinking on the outward and the inward man in the way He set **HIS PRIORITIES**. Look at the vignette described in John 4:31-34. Jesus was focused on having the opportunity to save the lost, and He had zero concern for whether He had eaten or not. This preference for feeding the inward man instead of the outward man is strikingly at odds with our culture. It's fair to say that we live in a food-obsessed society. In some ways, this is very obvious, when we consider the 44-ounce Big Gulps and Double Quarter Pounders and Reese's Pieces Blizzards that are part of our national fabric. There are millions of people who live lives that are focused on consuming those things, and that's why the United States is one of the most obese nations on the face of the earth.

However, what about the opposite? What about all the people who weigh three times a day and count every calorie that passes their lips and stress and obsess about their diets? Isn't that just as much a fixation on the outward man as the other? The behavior might be opposite, but the motivation is the same. What kind of disciples would we be if we were as unconcerned with eating as Jesus was? What would happen in our spiritual lives if we took all the time we spent loving food, hating food, living for food, and devoted that time and emotional energy to teaching the lost instead?

Consider too how Jesus viewed the outward and the inward man with respect to **HIS GOALS**. He presents this in John 6:63. Here, He tells us that we have two choices. We can live a life that is focused on the flesh, the outward man, or we can live a life that is focused on the spirit, the inward man. Without exception, the life that is focused outwardly is a useless, meaningless life, and that is true no matter what outward focus we choose. Only seeking the things of the spirit as directed by the word can give us life indeed. This, I think, is one of the great secrets of the life of Christ. He was able to resist the devil so completely because He didn't care about the temptations offered by the outward man.

This is not the same thing as asceticism. The Pharisees were ascetics. They imposed a whole bunch of rules on their outward man that God didn't. They fasted twice a week. They refused to eat with sinners. They tithed the herbs from their backyard gardens. However, all that asceticism actually took them away from God because their emphasis on outward show allowed the devil to corrupt their hearts. Jesus, on the other hand, didn't feel the need to make up all these rules to show how holy He was. He sought God from the heart and obeyed from the heart. The flesh didn't have any power over Him because He was never concerned with the flesh. He was concerned only with God.

Finally, Jesus' concern for the outward and inward man appears most in **HIS SELF-SACRIFICE**. Consider Peter's take on this in 1 Peter 2:24. This is where we see Jesus practicing what He preached. He actively sought for His body to be crucified so that it could bear the sins of mankind. It's hard to imagine a more profound statement of indifference toward the flesh. He was so determined to sow to the spirit that He was willing to kill His flesh to accomplish it. Jesus didn't enjoy this, but His suffering was less important to Him than our victory.

As we are about to partake of the Lord's Supper, let's allow Jesus' attitude to guide our thinking in two main ways. First, let's remember to be thankful that Jesus had the mind He did. When Jesus came to earth, He put on flesh like our flesh. He faced the temptations that we face. His outward man wasn't interested in dying in its early thirties any more than ours would be. However, Jesus refused to allow His body to set His priorities. He refused to live for the

outward man, either in allowing to guide His life or in being obsessed with asceticism. Instead, He lived for the inward man, with its desire to serve God and others rather than the self. That's why He was willing to die for us.

That's the way that Jesus saw things. As His disciples, how do we see things? Do we live guided by the inward man, with indifference directed toward the outward man? Let's examine ourselves in these things as we partake.

### **Caring for Our Inward Man**

Just one trip to the bookstore, one meander across the Internet will tell us that every year, there are countless words written about what we have to do to take care of our outward man. For the disciple of Christ, though, caring for the outward man can't be the most important thing in our lives. Let's look at caring for the inner man instead.

The first thing we must do to take care of our inward selves is to **CLEAN UP**. Jesus Himself comments on this in Matthew 15:16-18. The Jews were a culture that had a great fascination with ritual washings and ritual cleanliness. For different reasons, this is a fascination that modern America shares. We are much more concerned with bathing frequently and smelling good than most people around the world today are. I think we're all much happier on Sunday morning when we show up at the assembly and everybody smells like the HBA department at Wal-Mart instead of like stink.

Jesus tells us here, though, that outward cleanliness should be much more important to us than cleanliness within. Quite frankly, a lot of Christians get that backwards. They wouldn't think of leaving the house without showering first, and yet they are quite content to go through life saying the most awful things to their families and their brethren. They have mouths that are filled with meanness, and so too are their hearts. Friends, just like personal hygiene is the lowest level of caring for our outward man, spiritual hygiene is the lowest level of caring for our inward man. If we're going to do anything, let's be sure to watch over our hearts, so that we don't go around spewing unpleasantness at others.

Second, let's **DRINK UP**. Once again, this comes from the lips of our Lord, in John 4:13-14. This is a tough passage to interpret, but I think that the living water that Jesus is referring to is the knowledge of Him. Nor is Christ's warning about the recurring thirst of the outward man limited to literal water. The truth is that nothing in this physical world can satisfy us for long. If we spend two years planning our dream vacation and then go on it, we'll want to go on vacation again later. If we buy our dream house, it won't be too long before we're thirsty for a better one. For those of us who are unmarried, if we marry the man or woman of our dreams, even they cannot quench the longing of our spirits, and I think that the divorce rate in our country is so high because so many expect more out of marriage than it can offer.

Only when we drink the living water of the knowledge of our Savior is the thirst of our souls finally slaked. Jesus doesn't leave us feeling empty and dissatisfied. Instead, the more we seek Him, the more satisfaction and the more peace we find. And yet, even though we know that Jesus can satisfy and the things of this life cannot, how much time do we spend ignoring Him and pursuing them? How about this instead: The next time we find ourselves thinking about some earthly vacation, let's take that time instead to consider our journey to heaven. The next time we catch ourselves daydreaming about the perfect house, let's contemplate the house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. Let's stop wasting our time thinking about this world's empty promises and set our hearts instead on Jesus.

Third, let's work to **BUILD UP** our inward man rather than our outward one. Paul contrasts these two alternatives in 1 Timothy 4:8. Part of our society's outward focus is our interest in physical fitness. There are a lot of Christians here who work out, and there are a lot more who wish they were. As Paul says, there's some profit to that. We may feel better, have more energy, and so on. However, any profit is limited. No matter how scrupulously we take care of ourselves, every day, our outward man is still decaying. We are still one day closer to our physical ruin and our physical death. If we work hard, we might make the movie a little longer, but we can't change the ending. When that ending comes, all the time and money and effort we spent on physical fitness will be worth exactly nothing.

That doesn't mean it's a mistake to work out. However, it is a mistake when we exercise the outward man, but not the inward one. When we hit the gym, but we don't make it to Wednesday night services, that's a mistake. If we can find an hour every day for our physical fitness routine, but we can't find an hour to study or pray, we're investing our time in the wrong place. Sure, exercise has its value, but it pales in comparison to seeking the Lord. Godliness will make our lives richer today, and best of all, it will help us on to eternal life, which is the best investment we can make.

Fourth, let's **DRESS UP**. Peter makes this application especially to women in 1 Peter 3:3-4. However, just like the Biblical admonitions to modesty apply to all Christians, I think this one does too. Our society thinks clothing is a big deal. It has to be in the right style, from the right store, and make precisely the statement about us that we want to make. As the saying goes, "Clothes make the man."

Actually, that's totally wrong. Clothes don't make the man, or the woman, for that matter. Righteousness does. God is completely indifferent to what the tag on our jeans says. He is concerned with the way we clothe the hidden person of the heart. There are a number of things that the Bible says we should put on: truth, humility, and love, to name a few. When people talk to us, they shouldn't come away impressed by our dress sense. Instead, they should remember our character. We should take great care when we dress, but that care should be directed inwardly, not outwardly.

Finally, let's **LAY UP** treasures for the inward man first and the outward man second. Look at the words of Jesus, once again, in Matthew 6:19-21. If we are prudent, one of the ways that we care for the outward man is by setting aside money and other resources for future use. There's a great sense of security that comes from that pile of money in the bank or the stock market. What Jesus wants us to understand, though, is that that sense of security is illusory. Stock markets crash. Banks go bust. Even governments collapse. As the legal boilerplate on all the financial websites says, "Past performance is not a guarantee of future results." For that matter, nothing about our lives themselves is guaranteed. We could find ourselves in the same position as the foolish farmer of Luke 12. We could have enough stuff stored up to live the good life for decades to come and die of a heart attack the night before we retire.

Instead, Jesus urges us to care for the inward man by laying up treasure in heaven. He does not specify what this means, but let me propose a possible yardstick. We all know that we can't save pocket change for our retirement and expect that to amount to anything when we retire. We have to make a meaningful sacrifice now to receive a meaningful benefit later. Logically, the same ought to hold true for laying up treasure in heaven. We have to give enough of our money, our time, and our energy to the Lord that we feel it, that it represents a choice to forego a significant portion of what this world has to offer. That's laying up treasure. If we do that, though, our hearts will follow what we give. The more we surrender to the Lord, the more He will matter, and the more we will anticipate spending forever with Him.