

The Change We Need

Introduction. Change is an ongoing part of life. With its constant flux, life demands adjustments for our schedules and plans. But people's spiritual lives call for more than slight changes to the calendar. Their lives are in need of transformation.

Mark Twain reportedly said that church is good people standing in front of good people teaching them to be good people. The change people need is not simply trying harder to be a better person; that would be a gross misunderstanding of transformation. The gospel is bigger than simple moralism, and people need to understand the extensive nature of transformation.

I. ***Real Change Starts With New Life, Not Just A New Leaf***

- A. The very heart of the gospel revolves around change, but it is not turning over a new leaf -- it is living out a new life (2 Corinthians 5:17).
 1. We can, at times, communicate the need for change in peoples' lives, and it ends up sounding like low-level therapeutic nonsense -- where a faraway God makes life better and makes you a better person.
 2. But that is not the gospel. We do not want to produce good religious people. We see what becomes of good religious people from the encounters of Jesus and the Pharisees. God wants people transformed at a spiritual level rather than just at a behavioral level.
- B. Trying to "turn over a new leaf" is a temporary fix to an eternal problem; and, it leads to the frustrating, exasperating cycle of always looking for a new fix to our lives.
 1. In the Old Testament, we see how this cycle played out in the life of Solomon. He tried to change through human ingenuity when he needed divine intervention; and he was the smartest person -- ever (Ecclesiastes 1:12-18).
 2. Solomon's own words show the "folly" of hoping to change one's own life. With access to wisdom, finances, military power, and everything else one could possibly hope for, Solomon found life to be no more than chasing the wind. He needed an outside force to grant something new rather than continuing after something old.
- C. In John 3, Jesus was approached by someone who needed change. Nicodemus had the right pedigree, the right spiritual training, and the right position in society, but had not been transformed. He was most likely moral and definitely religious. But Jesus said he needed to be "born again" (John 3:3, 5).

D. We need to give up on changing our own lives. Rather than wasting time on self-initiated change, we should follow God's plan to grant us a new life. Only a new life, produced by repentance, confession, and being "born of water and of the Spirit" will suffice.

II. ***Real Change Is A Process, Not A Destination***

- A. No one ever gets to a place of being everything God has called them to be on this side of eternity. It is part of why we yearn for eternal life with Him. Our life is one of growth (1 Peter 2:2; 2 Peter 3:18). God will complete the work of transformation in us (Philippians 1:6). Regeneration happens in a moment (Titus 3:5; 1 Peter 3:21), but transformation consistently happens day by day.
- B. It is an astounding thought that God would share His "divine nature" with us (2 Peter 1:4). By removing the human desire for significance and replacing it with the divine nature of sacrifice, our lives proceed in a new direction (Romans 12:1-2). It is a process that causes life to have true significance -- reflecting God's glory (2 Corinthians 3:18).
1. Every night, we have a visible lesson for this principle with the Moon. The Moon does not produce light but reflects the light produced by the Sun.
 2. The shadow that overtakes the Moon is caused by the Earth blocking the Sun's light. If the Earth is in the way, the Moon cannot reflect the Sun's light. The light is veiled.
- C. Allowing the "lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life" to get in the way will certainly veil the glory of God from reflecting in our lives (1 John 2:15-16). The veil is removed through transformation, and His glory in us sets us more deeply into the mission that people of every tongue, tribe, and nation will be transformed by Him too (Romans 8:29-30).

III. ***Real Change Is Extremely Difficult***

- A. Because of man's free moral agency, God does not force anyone to change, but He calls us to change (2 Thessalonians 2:14). The command to be holy sounds like an impossible task, but its possibility comes by the power of the gospel (1 Peter 1:16).
- B. We are called to put off the "old man" and take hold of the "new man" (Ephesians 4:20-24). For some reason, it seems part of our psyche to resist change, even when the new is so much better. Why is change so difficult for people?
1. Because people are stubborn.
 - a) Have you ever tried to take something out of a two-year-old's hand? Much to the dismay of every parent, two-year-olds are

amazingly strong and nimble. When they want to hold onto a toy, it is not easy to take it from them.

- b) But we are all just like them. We gain a laser-focus on what we hope to keep. Many people simply need to realize that it is time to unclench our fist and live the way Christ wants (Hebrews 3:8, 15; 4:7).
2. Because people are trapped.
 - a) Perhaps you have heard the illustration of how to trap a monkey. All you need is a rock and a coconut. Drill a hole in the coconut large enough to put the rock inside, but not large enough for anything else. A monkey will reach inside to take hold of the rock, but its clenched fist around the rock will not fit back through the hole. The monkey will, in effect, trap itself because of a refusal to let go of the rock.
 - b) Many Christians trap themselves with a clenched fist. Holding onto sin or the irrelevancies of life can keep a person from their new life in Christ (Luke 21:34).
 3. Because people are comfortable.
 - a) Did you know that some people still use a rotary-dial phone? Why would someone continue to use a piece of technology that is inferior? Because they are comfortable with it. It is familiar, and they have mastered it.
 - b) We get comfortable with sin. We get comfortable with our standard of living, and it keeps us from living righteously. We need to take hold of something better: God's standard of righteousness (Romans 10:1-3)
 4. Because people are afraid.
 - a) Fear of the unknown is a primary reason people do not change. Some think following Jesus will make them a fanatic or, at the very least, socially awkward.
 - b) In facing the world, we should not have a spirit of fear, but of power, love, and of a sound mind (2 Timothy 1:7).
 5. Because change hurts.
 - a) It is hard to change. People never change until the pain of staying the same grows greater than the pain of change. From a minor adjustment to a complete overhaul, change has a price-tag. It hurts to reorganize an office, lose weight, or correct a sinful behavior.
 - b) Knowing this, we should construct our lives to embrace difficult challenges which will mold our character into one of discipline and perseverance (1 Kings 18:21). By doing what is hard on a daily basis, we are constantly training ourselves so that on other days, in other situations, we can remain solid.

Conclusion. We cannot choose whether change will come or not. But we can choose whether to embrace it or resist it. It is critical to choose the kind of change that produces obedience in us personally and in the world for the sake of his kingdom.

Transformation is there for the choosing. But the alternative to this biblically-mandated transformation is eternal condemnation (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9). The change we all need is the change offered by Christ.