

PART 2 – WHAT TO CHANGE, HOW TO CHANGE

Since I did not get through last week explaining how I am going to teach this series, I wanted to finish that up, and look specifically at what I will be trying to achieve and how I want to achieve it. I think the “how” part is very important, so here is specifically the methodology that I am going to use each week. In general, as we progress through the series each week, from the 38,000-foot level this is what I want to achieve. I will try to answer some general questions that I believe are important. We will look at the following areas related to spiritual change:

1. What is spiritual change?
2. Why is spiritual change needed?
3. What is the actual “process” that leads to spiritual change?
4. What do the Scriptures ask of each of us personally when it comes to spiritual change?
5. What is it in our life that is preventing us from making meaningful spiritual changes?

Answering these five questions will be ongoing throughout the study, and not something that I will try and answer in just one study. Stated in a simple way, this is going to be a study about making the kind of changes in our life that God wants us to make.

Now, what I have decided to do is to take a little different approach to how I actually teach these messages. First, what I want to do is to take what we can call a **“deep dive” into an actual Scripture related to change**. Each week I want to simply call this **“Part 1 - What to Change”**. This will deal with a specific Scripture that is related to the concept of spiritual change **OR** to a specific change that is needed in our life. That will be Part 1 – a deep dive into a specific verse or passage of Scripture.

Then, secondly, I want to take what we learn from the Part 1 exegesis and exposition and **make it as practical and as sensible as I possibly can for our lives and learn how we can and should apply it to our lives**. I want to call this **“Part 2 – How to Change”**. Practically, think of it as “What and How”. Technically think of it as “Doctrine and Application”. So, every week, I want the message to be a two-step process where the exegesis and exposition of a selected verse or passage about change will come first. It may not be a verse about you actually changing, but it will be a verse about change. Just as an example, it may be a verse like [2 Corinthians 5:17](#) which says,

2Co 5:17 (NKJV) Therefore, if anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

Now, this verse does not actually even use the word change, but it implies that at the moment of salvation, that there is something that should have taken place in a new believer’s life. That level of change will vary from person to person, but if nothing has actually changed, then it is very doubtful that any kind of spiritual change has even taken place. In my mind, and I say this with all of the grace that I know how, **this is the greatest change that has ever happened to you as a believer**. You became a “new creation”, and part of that reality is that **“old things...passed away”**. I love the ISV when it says that the **“old has disappeared”**. Salvation is not just some kind of cosmetic change to someone, but it is a deep, enduring, spiritual change that is evidenced in the person’s life. Some people are more than satisfied to simply pray the proverbial “sinner’s prayer” (whatever that is), and then go about living however they may choose to live. If they want to live a life that is contrary to how God wants them to

live, then they live however they want. So, just saying the “sinner’s prayer” is not salvation, nor can it be proven from Scripture that it is. If you will read through the New Testament, to the best of my knowledge, there is not one single place where either Jesus or any of the apostles just asked people to pray a prayer. What was asked of people is that they first “**believe**”. The Greek word for “**believe**” means to entrust your life to someone. It is yielding the control of your life to someone else. Whenever you get on an airplane and fly somewhere, you are entrusting your life into the care of the pilots, and when you “believe in the Lord Jesus Christ”, you are entrusting your life into His care. So, the reality of what this word means is that you can actually mentally agree and even believe that Jesus is who He said that He was, BUT never actually entrust your life to Him. My mother-in-law truly believed in airplanes, but she would never have flown on one. She would never have entrusted her life to a pilot of a plane.

So, how would we approach this verse? Well, we will take a deep dive into both the meaning and the implications of that meaning. If we do not know what something actually means, then that verse or passage will never effectively impact our life. In a verse like this, you have to ask yourself the right questions. The questions would be something like this:

“Have the old things actually passed away and disappeared in my life? Or,

“Am I any spiritually different today from the day that I thought that I got saved?”

“What does ‘passed away’ mean?”

“What are the ‘old things’?”

“Have ‘all things...become new’?”

“What is ‘a new creation’?”

The answer to these questions is that if real salvation has occurred, then the old habits, the recurring sins, the ungodly behaviors, the addictions to the wrong things, the sinful inclinations and tendencies, an ungodly lifestyle, and the old preferences should have “**passed away**”. Practically, the elimination of these sinful elements in your life may not have happened the very moment you were saved, but gradually as you began to grow in your Christian walk, you had this deep and abiding desire to eliminate them from your life. You are now a “**new creation**”, and part of your new spiritual DNA is that your desire to follow Christ became much greater than your desire to just live for yourself. If that has never happened, and if nothing has really “changed”, then you were never saved. You may be somewhat religious, but not really be saved. Think of it this way.

You cannot be saved without being changed. Salvation is a change.

It is a change that impacts every area of your life. It is a change that is undeniably present in your life. It is a change where now what you use to want to do, you hate doing. It is a real change in every sense of the word. It is not just outwardly modifying your behavior in some way, but it is an actual spiritual change, an actual life-transforming change that has taken place in your life.

So, what would be the value of NOT answering these kinds of questions honestly? I can transparently and sincerely say that I have never been the same from the day that I was saved. The old things, the old habits, the old, ugly words, the drugs – they vanished and disappeared, and my life has been so different

since that late evening in January 1971 when I was truly “born again”. Jesus said this to Nicodemus in [John 3:3](#),

Jn 3:3 (NKJV) Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

For me, the most important word in this verse is “unless” which means “until and not before”. It is something that can only happen or be true under particular circumstances. I.e., you “**cannot**” be a part of God’s kingdom unless or until you have been born again. Just being religious will not save you. Just coming to church will not save you. Being good will not save you. Being baptized will not save you. The only thing that will save you is that you **MUST** be “**born again**”. Listen to how the Amplified Bible says this. This is great.

Jn 3:3 (AMP) Jesus answered him, I assure you, most solemnly I tell you, that unless a person is born again (anew, from above), he cannot ever (can never) see (know, be acquainted with, and experience) the kingdom of God.

For me personally, I will never go back to my old life. I hate it now. I hate seeing young people today thinking it has something to offer them because I know that it has absolutely nothing to offer them. It robbed me of everything that was good. It cheated me and lied to me about what was right. It was always asking me to do what was wrong, and unfortunately, I was captivated by wrong things, and I literally became what Jesus called “**a slave of sin**”. He said these words in [John 8:34](#),

Jn 8:34 (NKJV) Jesus answered them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin."

The word “**commits**” means to continue to practice as a way of life, and the word “**is**” means “**is and will remain to be**”. Today, however, all of the things that I use to love, I hate them now. Why? It is because when I was saved, I became a “**new creation**”, and you should hate your old life of sin as well. All that kind of life does is deprive you of God’s best for your life. You should know that you are uniquely and divinely different on the inside and because of that, it should show on the outside, and if it does not, I seriously doubt that you have ever been saved.

So, “**Part 2 – How to Change**” will be the application of the exposition of a passage and it will come second. Think of what we are going to do this way.

“Okay, I now know what this passage actually means, so how am I going to apply it to my life? How am I going to get this verse to work in my life, and am I even willing to consider letting it work on me so that I will obey it in my life?”

Some believers never seem to read the Bible much at all, and when they do read it, it is rarely with the intention of ever obeying what it actually says. So, I want you to clearly understand that when we get to the application of God’s truth in our life that I am going to challenge you to make real life biblical changes. I know this may sound a little arrogant on my part, so please forgive me, but **I want you to “feel” the weight of Scripture on your life**. I want you to comprehend and understand the actual weight of the Scripture on your life. I imagine at times that this whole process will be somewhat uncomfortable for both you and me because I never not want you to just casually walk out of a service thinking “*That passage just doesn’t apply to me. I don’t have to do anything.*”. Listen very carefully. Every passage

applies to you. Every command applies to you. Every truth of Scripture applies to you. Scripture does not make requests. It lays out truth that God wants us to obey and integrate into our lives. There is nothing complicated here. None of us have an exemption where we do not have to obey the Word of God. Actually, that is complete spiritual nonsense. If I can say it this way, that is the devil in your head.

So, in this method of study, what we want to do is to make the changes that Scripture says we need to make to be two things. First, the changes have to be **realistic**. I have no intention of coming up with all kinds of demands on your life that simply are unrealistic. However, I am sure that many of the applications may be challenging for you. Honestly, I think they should be. Every good coach is constantly challenging his players to excellence, to go the extra mile, the give their very best. That is what good coaches do. He never comes to practice and simply says “*Okay, today just do whatever you want to do, work at your own pace, and hopefully when we get to the big game, everything will work out just great.*” Every good coach, and pastor, is always challenging his team or his people to excellence. So, the changes that I will address will be realistic and achievable.

Secondly the changes have to be **measurable**. The changes have to be something that allow you to measure, to determine, to quantify, to appraise your spiritual progress. I set a goal that I wanted to read at least two books each week. That goal is very measurable and reachable for me personally. It is very easy to see when I am reaching that goal. However, my first goal was that I had to learn how to discipline myself to speed read – which I did. It was the first goal that made the second goal so much easier to achieve. If I have to read every single word on every single page, it would take me way too long. I can generally read a 200 – 250 page book while Brenda drives me to the doctor in Augusta, waiting in the waiting room, waiting in the patient room, and then reading while driving back. If I am just a little short of completing the book, I can sit down and finish it as soon as I get home. This is a very measurable goal for me.

So, we all want to make sure that we have a way of measuring whether or not we are actually serious about our Christian life. I promise that I will not lord that over you, but I am going to encourage and challenge you to make changes in your life where you know that they need to be made. You may resist, you may balk at what I ask you to do, and you may refuse to make any changes at all, and there is nothing that I can do to stop you from doing that. However, that is not going to deter me from both encouraging you and challenging you to change what Scripture says that you need to change. As your pastor, I believe in you. I believe in God’s work in you. I trust you to listen and to consider what I am teaching – to actually trust me that I have earnestly studied and prayed and studied and prayed some more to provide you with the best exposition that I am capable of giving. The problem with the application part is that it is subjective. Generally, the Scriptures are not definitive as to how we are to implement certain changes into our life. God gives us a truth, a principle, a standard that He wants us to live by, but then He leaves it up to us to use our divine common sense on how to apply that principle and integrate it into our life, and when we do that one thing, then spiritual change begins to take place in our life– but not before.

In my mind, it is critical that we understand and always keep in the forefront of our mind that meaningful change is always a “**process**”. Do not lose sight of that in this series – **change is always a process**. It is rarely, if ever, instant. I want you to see it as a progression, as a growing in the grace and knowledge of Christ, but it is something that must eventually become evident to be considered real change. It involves certain critical habits like discipline, seeking God, prayer, Bible study, setting goals. Remember

that I have shared with you that research has shown that you can develop a really good habit that leads to meaningful change in your life in 66 days. I have no idea how the researchers have come up with that number, but it is basically just two months of doing the right thing and it can become a meaningful life changing habit for the rest of your life. Now, I want to make one final observation that is really critical to me personally as your pastor.

When I speak of change, I do not primarily want to focus on what you are doing, but on what you are becoming.

What kind of person are you actually becoming in your spiritual life? Is your life something that you want your children to imitate? Is your life something that you know is becoming more and more a reflection of Jesus Christ? Is your life something that your friends can look at and be encouraged? Is your life something that is making a spiritual impact on other people? Does your wife or your husband or your children believe in you? Can they see who you were in the past, but look at the kind of person you have become and be really grateful for the changes they see God making in you? So, the question is simple - **what kind of person are you actually becoming?** Can you personally look back to what you were like before you were saved and know that **“He who has begun a good work in you”** is actually completing that work in you? I hope that you can. So, as we go through this series, my earnest prayer is that when you see and understand what God clearly wants you to change in your life, that you will open your life up to making those changes so that you can become all that He wants you to be. You will never regret allowing Him to help you to become more and more and more like Christ - never.