

PART 4 – COMPLETELY UPSIDE DOWN

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Someone asked me recently why I was teaching on a subject like “Embracing Change”. My answer was simple. Jesus was always challenging people to change different areas of their life. Just in His first sermon alone, He asked people to change. We have the Beatitudes, take up your cross, wash your brother’s feet, build your life on the right foundation, love God, love your neighbor, go the extra mile, be forgiving when someone wrongs you. Where do you stop? The list is endless.

When I think of Christianity, it is actually a kind of an upside-down thing to me. Does “**love your enemies**” and “**bless those who curse you**”, and “**whoever slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other**” make any sense to you? Honestly, it sounds completely upside down to me. What we normally think is very big is actually very small in God’s eyes. What the world thinks is really very important is completely unimportant to God. One author that I read said that “*small is the new big*”.¹ I thought that was right on target. Listen to how Jesus said that in [Mark 10:42-45](#).

Mk 10:42 (NKJV) But Jesus called them to *Himself* and said to them, "You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. ⁴³ Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. ⁴⁴ And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. ⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

That was really upside-down thinking for His disciples. I really do not think that they got it, and I doubt seriously that many of us get it either. If I were to ask you what God wants to change in your life, I wonder what would you say? Here is how I would answer that question. **He wants to change everything**. Let me say it again. **He wants to change everything**. He wants **to change and keep on changing** your speech, your attitudes, your values, your desires, your habits, your relationships, everything. There is not one area of our life that God does not want to touch and change – not one area. There is not one area of my life that does not need any improvement. I am a complete fool if I actually think that I have nothing to change. Everything in our life is on the table for God to change, and it always will be.

PART 1 – WHAT TO CHANGE

So, as we begin to look at specific verses and passages that identify what God wants us to change, I want to begin with [2 Peter 3:18](#). Please keep your Bible open to this verse.

2Pe 3:18 (NKJV) but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him *be the glory both now and forever. Amen.*

The area that we are going to specifically address is “**grace**” – growing in grace, or what I want to call “*changing because of grace*”. If someone were to ask me what I needed the most from God, I would say that I am absolutely desperate to have God’s grace working in my life. When things may not be going so great, I just need grace not to lose heart. In some ways, I feel spiritually naked when I do not sense that His grace is strengthening me and helping me. What I know in my mind and in my heart is

¹ Groeschel, *Power*, 37.

that when I am weak that He is strong, that He will give me a supernatural rest, that He will never fail me or leave me, and that no matter what I may do in my life that displeases Him that He will never stop loving me and that my salvation is still secure. Here is what I have learned. This is so super important.

God’s grace is normally learned through the really difficult moments and struggles we experience in our life, and especially when we fail.

There will always be times when we all fail, but failure is just one of God’s ways of helping us to grow spiritually. Once again, I know this is upside down, but I truly believe that **my failure is much more important than my success**. Why is that? It is because I learn more through my failures and my struggles. It is the difficult moments and the difficult people where we learn more about the grace of God than we knew before. Without God’s grace operating in our life, we will always be prone to making wrong decisions when we are in the midst of a really difficult struggle or trial in our life. The problem that creates is simple.

Bad decisions always lead to bad results.

Please do not miss this reality. We will say the wrong thing. We will hurt people. We will get angry. Without the grace of God functioning in our life, we have no chance of being spiritually successful in our life - none. You must understand how the grace of God operates in your life and how you can receive it. Ignore that statement, and your spiritual life will be mediocre at best.

❖ **STUCK IN THE MUD**

Now, remember our definition of grace. It is when God gives us two very specific attributes for our life. These are so critical to our understanding of grace. Grace is when He gives us the **desire** to do His will, then secondly, He gives us the **power** to do His will. If you have no desire to do what God wants you to do, then you can be assured that you will have no power to do it. Personal will-power never works. It is always too draining on you. Relying on your personal will-power is like getting stuck in the mud. Your wheels are spinning, but you simply are not going anywhere. You must have the supernatural power of God strengthening you to do what He wants you to do. I know this may sound a little harsh, so just bear with me, but if deep down in your life you have no desire to change what God wants you to change, then you really have no compelling reason to even consider yourself to be a Christian. Why is that? It is because of the following. This is so super important.

OUTWARD SPIRITUAL CHANGE IS ALWAYS THE EVIDENCE OF INWARD SPIRITUAL LIFE.

There has to be something **spiritual on the inside that is driving that which is spiritual on the outside**. If you are truly “**born again**”, it means that you **ACTUALLY** have this spiritual life within you. You have a spiritual seed dwelling in you that has life in it. [1 Peter 1:23](#) says this about every believer.

1Pe 1:23 (NKJV) having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever,

Every good seed grows and bears fruit. The actual word for “**grow**” in [2 Peter 3:18](#) means to enlarge, to increase,² but the Greek nuance of this word “**grow**” is that in order for something to actually grow,

² Zodhiates, *auxano*, ep.

it has to have the element of life within it. For instance, a good seed has the element of life in it to grow. You can plant an acorn and get a huge oak tree. You can plant a tomato seed and get a large tomato plant. However, a dead tree limb lying on the ground has no element of life within it, so if you chose to plant it in the ground and fertilize it and water it and tend it, it would not matter. Why? It is because it does not have the element of life in it. It is dead. So, for the person who never exhibits any spiritual growth in their life, the reason is probably because they DO NOT actually have the element of spiritual life dwelling in them. I would say that they have never really been saved. The way to think about this is simple:

NO OUTWARD SPIRITUAL FRUIT REVEALS NO INWARD SPIRITUAL LIFE.

That is a critical reality that cannot be ignored. **Spiritual growth is always evidenced by spiritual fruit.** In my understanding of Scripture, there are no exceptions. The modern church culture has softened this a great deal, but personally I do not believe that Scripture has. If I constantly see someone who claims to be a Christian, but never has any spiritual growth in their life, I have no reason to think that they are actually saved. If you have been born again by the Spirit of God, your life will always be experiencing spiritual growth at some level. Are there exceptions? There may be, but why would we ever want to think that we can be the exception? That does not even make sense. It is not even logical.

Now, I want you to notice that there is only **one verb** in the first sentence of **2 Peter 3:18**. Remember that the “verbs” are the action words, the words that specifically identify how God wants us to live. They are the words that **create God’s spiritual direction for your life.** The reason this is such a critical verse for your life is because the verb “grow” is a **present tense, imperative mood, active voice verb.** Let me break that down and analyze it for you. It is a very simple verb to parse, so bear with me as I explain all of this. This is not new for you.

1. **Present tense – something that should always be happening in our life.** The present tense refers to something that is to be ongoing in our life. It is technically defined as “*continuous action*”. It means that you could translate this verse as “**keep continually growing in grace**”. In this case, either we **ARE** growing spiritually or we **ARE NOT** growing spiritually. There is no middle of the road here. So, what is the evidence of whether or not we are actually growing spiritually? This is clear and simple.

THE EVIDENCE OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH IS ALWAYS SPIRITUAL FRUIT.

No growth, no fruit. In the winter, my fruit trees are not growing, and when they are not growing, they are not producing any fruit whatsoever. If you know that you are not really growing spiritually, then there is something seriously wrong, and something needs to change. In my garden, my tomatoes are growing prolifically, but the cucumber seeds that I planted never even poked their head out of the ground. Bad cucumber seeds. Now, your spiritual life may be exactly like what I am addressing - there never seems to be any spiritual growth or any meaningful spiritual changes that you are making in your life. Whatever you think you are growing in spiritually is not even poking its head out of the ground. Spiritual growth always mandates change, and that growth is always visible. You use to be harsh, now you are kind. You use to be impatient, now you are patient. You use to be anxious about everything, now you are relaxed

and at peace. Okay, that is the present tense – your spiritual life is to be continually changing, continually growing.

2. **Imperative mood – this makes growing and changing a command, not an option.** A present tense imperative mood verb calls for this to be the believer’s **continual passionate pursuit**.³ Unfortunately, as a believer, you can just ignore growing spiritually if it does not fit into your lifestyle. You might say something like this:

“Oh, I’m just too busy Lord.” or,

“Concentrating on my spiritual growth just takes up too much of my time.” or, and this may be the most dangerous excuse of all,

“I do not think that there are any areas of my life that need any significant change.” You are the person on spiritual auto-pilot, and that is not good.

I said it this way a couple of weeks ago, but that kind of nonsense is just the devil in your head. When God tells us to do something in the imperative mood, He is not asking us to consider doing it. This is not a casual suggestion that God wants us to possibly consider. **The imperative mood of a verb is what God uses to create His spiritual direction for our life.** If you say to one of your children *“Go finish your homework”*, you are creating specific direction for their life.

Think of it this way. God’s commands are God’s trajectory for our life. A command is something that He wants every single one of us to **concentrate** and **focus** on and to evaluate whether or not we are actually incorporating it into our life. We have to make an honest spiritual assessment as to whether or not real, meaningful spiritual growth is actually happening in our life. Here are two questions that the imperative mood forces each one of us to ask, so listen carefully.

“Am I ignoring God’s commands in my life?” **OR** *“Am I obeying God’s commands in my life?”*

It is one or the other. There is nothing in the middle.

3. **Active voice – this is something that God wants YOU to do.** The active voice always places the responsibility for obedience on ME, on YOU. I.e., it is our personal responsibility to ensure that meaningful spiritual growth is actually happening in our life. For the most part, there is no “rule” book on how to do most of what God asks us to do, so what He does is give us the freedom to use our divine common sense on how we need to accomplish something. For instance, in **Ephesians 5:25** where God tells a husband to love his wife like Christ loved the church, the next verse does not tell him how. The husband has to figure out how to do that – not his wife. It is his responsibility. If I can say it this way, and this is really kind of exciting to me, it is like God is giving me the privilege to build the life not only that He wants for me, but the life that I want as well. With the active voice, it is like God is saying,

“I want you to demonstrate how committed you really are to me and how much you actually love me, but I trust you to figure out how to do what I have asked you to do. I want it to be from your heart. I want you to obey me because you really love me.”

³ Precept, 2 Peter 3:18, ep.

If you choose, you can do nothing, or you can do something. The active voice is making you choose. This is not “*let go and let God*”. That is the passive voice in the Greek language. To the contrary, this is,

“Gary, I want you to constantly be doing everything in your power to ensure that you are always growing spiritually. I want you to determine what it takes to grow spiritually and how to ensure that it is happening in your life.”

Obviously, the Holy Spirit will help us. He has never intended for us to live the Christian life on our own, or by our will power, or without Him. He will always be there to help us, **BUT** until we make a **real-life decision** that we are going to address the areas of our life that we know need to change, then unfortunately God may just let us wallow in our indifference and spiritual apathy. He is not going to say to any of us,

“Oh, okay, I see that you are not willing to consider this, so just don’t worry about it. I will make the changes for you so you can just continue to do whatever you want to do.”

Trust me, but that will not happen. So, the active voice is where the Greek language indicates that God is placing the responsibility for changing on you personally.

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