

“How to Change—Or Can I?” A Biblical Framework for Change—part 5**

A few years ago I was talking with my brother-in-law in our garage while we were doing some repair work on my car (okay, HE did most of the repair work and I assisted!). After we finished the job, I remember him saying to me, “Brad, it would be really wise for you to change your oil regularly. It’ll make a huge difference in the life of your car.” I got the message. I’d been prone to want to save a few bucks by letting the oil change schedule go to 8,000 or 10,000 miles, and he reminded me of the folly of saving a few bucks at the expense of my engine.

Something every mechanic knows is something every Christian should know. It has to do with P.M. —*preventative maintenance*. My car may be running fine today, or at least I think it is, but if I want it to be working properly for the long haul I must take necessary steps to prevent breakdowns BEFORE they occur. I must do *preventative maintenance*.

We’ve been talking about change for the past month. Today it’s time to ask the question, what happens AFTER you change?

Suppose, for instance, you’ve been working hard to kick a particular habit. Let’s suppose you kicked it. Now what? How you approach this time AFTER you’ve changed is as vital as how you worked on changing in the first place. In order for change to last, you need to do some PM, some SPIRITUAL *preventative maintenance*.

You say, “What’s that?” We’ll find out shortly, but first let’s make sure we have a handle on what we’ve learned thus far about change...

Looking Back: What we’ve learned about change...

In week one we discovered that we must face *the need to change*. We don’t change until we’re gripped by the need to do so. We also explored *some faulty views about how we change*, views that, if believed, will short-circuit lasting change.

In week two we learned about *the process of change*. This is one of the most important insights we must gain if we’re serious about changing. Change is a PROCESS, and involves lifelong responsibility on our part. If we do not understand the doctrine of progressive sanctification we will not change as we ought. What is progressive sanctification? As the terms indicate, we are being sanctified, that is, set apart from sin and to God, *progressively*. It takes time and effort to become the person God intends me to be. It’s a process. What’s involved in this process? We saw the answer in Ephesians 4:17-5:21. We learned that we must take specific steps to *put off* the old way of thinking and living and *put on* a Christlike way of thinking and living.

Then in week 3 we talked about *the environment for lasting change*. If I am serious about changing, the Bible says I must become a part of the God-ordained environment for lasting change, and that is *the local church*. By God’s design I need the church because the church provides three essentials vital for lasting change: encouragement, accountability, and an environment necessary to lasting change.

In our last time together (week 4), we addressed *the purpose of changing*. If I want to change I must ask myself the vital question, *Why? Why do I want to change?* What’s the right answer? According to God’s Word...

A. It’s not really about me.

Rather...

B. It's about God and His Son.

We pondered this statement, based on Romans 11:36 and 1 Corinthians 10:31...

Everything we do is either for the glory of God or for some other reason.

Simply put, God's agenda is to form a people who are like His Son. That's the goal He has in mind, to transform sinners into the likeness of Christ. That being the case, if we are going to change in lasting ways that please Him, we must have the same agenda. We must settle the issue of motive, that the reason I need to change isn't simply about me, but it's about God and His Son.

Now back to the question I posed at the outset...

VI. Once Change Takes Place, Then What?

It's time to do some spiritual preventative maintenance. There are two things we must do if change is going to stick.

A. Beware of wrong thinking...

If I think I can skip oil changes and not pay a price for it, I'm thinking wrongly and I will eventually pay a price for it. In terms of spiritual maintenance, here are some examples of *wrong thinking* that produce disaster in the long run...

"Look what I did."

Oh, we may not say it but we're prone to think it. "I kicked that habit, yes I did. I've changed because I got tired of what I was doing and I turned over a new leaf, and I...I...I."

Dear friend, remember this. "For from Him, through Him, and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever."

Without the Lord I can do nothing. *Nothing*. The very breath I am taking this moment is a gift from Him. If I change it's because He enabled me to change, and consequently, He deserves the credit.

"I've arrived."

But I haven't arrived. Change is a process. It's not something we attain in this life. We'll talk about that more in a moment.

"If I am pleased with my life, then I am okay."

Perhaps you have a loved one for whom you're concerned, and right here is the reason. You can see that they are ruining their lives. In fact, everybody can see it but them. And when you talk to them about the need to change some things, they stiffen and stiff arm you and say, "Oh, you're just overreacting. I'm okay."

We must always remember this. God is our Maker and as our Maker He knows what's best for us. He has told us what is best for us in His Word. To the extent that my life is not in line with the instructions of His Word, I need to change. Regardless of what my opinion is, the Creator says I need to change and in fact, will hold me accountable for my lack of change on judgment day.

"I can't change. I'll always be defeated."

This is a lie from the pit. The truth is that anyone can change, no matter what their past, no matter how severe their problems. Anyone can experience joy and peace and fulfillment in life, not because of some internal power they possess, but because of God's grace and His provision of new life in Jesus Christ.

In order for change to last, here's where we must begin. We must get rid of wrong thinking. Then we must do this...

B. Keep affirming the truth...

"What truth?" you ask. Here are four convictions that we must continually review...

1. We will battle sin until we see Christ.

Perhaps no passage in God's Word makes this point any clearer than Romans 7. The book of Romans is about *righteousness*. It answers the question of how to be right with God. The answer is, *by faith in Jesus Christ*. Here's the flow of the book of Romans...

As sinners, we enter the world *not* right with God (chapters 1-3a).

If we believe in Christ, we are *declared right* (chapters 3b-5).

If we've been declared right, we *can live right* (chapter 6).

But just because we *can* live right doesn't mean we always will (that's chapter 7).

If we are in Christ and have the power to live God-honoring lives, why don't we always? Paul becomes very transparent in chapter 7 and talks about his own personal struggle with sin. His confession teaches us four reasons why we still struggle.

a. We lack goodness (18-19).

Romans 7:18-19 I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing.

When I accepted Jesus Christ as my Savior He gave me a new heart with new and holy aspirations. He gave me a new “want to.” However, my performance does not always match my intentions. At times I fail to do the good I want to do. At other times I do the evil I really don’t want to do.

Why do I do that? Paul says he did it because he lacked something, *goodness*. Verse 18 —“I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature.” Contrary to the tenets of modern humanism, I am not basically a “good person,” but a sinner. According to man’s standard maybe I’m “good,” but not according to God’s. I lack goodness.

Even as a new creature in Christ I lack goodness. I have Christ’s goodness but none of my own. On my own I have a bent that goes my own way, not God’s.

Here’s a second reason why we struggle...

b. We still have sin living in us (20).

Romans 7:20 Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.

Paul says that sin is alive. It’s not an abstract concept, but a living force. Indeed, it is living in me. I cannot be passive and change. I must remain on the offensive and aggressively appropriate the resources of Christ to deal with this living threat called sin.

c. We are at war (21-23).

Romans 7:21-23 So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God’s law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members.

Did you notice those two words, “waging war”? Remember, this is the apostle Paul speaking,

the man who was used by God to lead hundreds of people to Christ, to establish a host of churches, an apostle who wrote nearly half of the New Testament, from a human perspective one of the most successful Christians who ever walked on planet earth. Yet what did he confess? When it came to personal change, he was at war!

I don't know what that fact does for you, but it comforts me greatly. I struggle with sin. It's a daily battle. It encourages me to hear the apostle Paul let me know he struggled, too. Though he'd walked with Christ for years, though he'd experienced victory after victory, he still struggled.

Thankfully, it's not a pointless and futile struggle, and here's why...

d. We experience deliverance when we depend on Christ (24-25).

Romans 7:24-25 What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.

Oh, the hope generated by those words, "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" Say it aloud with me... Affirm it for it is true. Who can deliver us? Jesus Christ can. He went to the cross and defeated sin, the author of sin, and death itself. He triumphed over our foes when He rose again. He lives today and gives forgiveness and redeeming power to all who will trust in Him.

In order for change to last, we must have these convictions. The first, we will battle until we see Christ.

2. *We need the armor of God every day.*

We read about this armor in Ephesians 6. We've investigate Ephesians 4-5 previously and learned that change involves putting off and putting on. Have you ever wondered why it's so hard to do that? We find one of the main reasons in Ephesians 6. It's because we have an enemy and are engaged in spiritual warfare.

Ephesians 6:10-12 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against *the devil's schemes*. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against *the spiritual forces of evil* in the heavenly realms.

Our foe is fierce, beloved. He does not want us to change in ways that bring glory to God. He wants us to flounder and fail and give up.

Thankfully, that need not happen. We can stand. Indeed, Paul commands us to stand. But how? What does it take to stand? It's not complicated. Simply put, we need two things...

a. We need the mindset of a soldier.

Ephesians 6:13 Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.

Again, the objective is to stand. Christ won the battle and we are to stand in His victory. I cannot afford to be passive, not if I want to stand. I need to think like a soldier.

b. We need the protection of Christ.

Paul calls that “the full armor of God” and describes it in verses 14-18.

The belt of truth

The breastplate of righteousness

The gospel of peace boots

The shield of faith

The helmet of salvation

The sword of the Spirit which is the word of God

That’s the armor God issues every soldier when He enlists them in His army. And what are we to do with this armor? Paul tells us to “put on” this armor. Sound familiar? Back in chapters 4-5 he charged us to “put on the new man.” What does that mean? Simply stated...

**To put on the armor is to put on Christ.

Christ is the truth. To put on the belt of truth is to put on Christ. Christ is righteousness. To put on the breastplate of righteousness is to put on Christ. Christ is the giver of peace. To put on the gospel of peace is to put on Christ. And so on...

We need the protection of Christ. How often?

Answer this. In combat times, how often does a soldier put on his protective gear? Is once in awhile good enough? Does the fact that he dressed for battle every day for the past three

months give him an excuse to NOT dress for battle today? Surely not.

It's the same for us. Every day we need the armor of God. Every day we need to put on Christ.

Don't gloss over that. In order to change, *we must put on Christ*. We must trust in Him. When we trusted in Him God delivered us from the penalty of sin. But it's when we trust in Him day by day that God delivers us from the power of sin. To experience deliverance we must absolutely and totally *depend on Him*.

In his book *I Want to Change...So, Help Me God*, James MacDonald tells the following story:

“More than a century ago, Charles Blondin became famous as a resident of Niagara Falls, Ontario, in Canada. Blondin was sort of a forerunner to Evel Knievel. Instead of jumping motorcycles across amazing chasms, he would simply walk...on a tightrope. His favorite venue was very close to home. Week after week back in 1860, Blondin would show up down at the falls and amaze the citizens on both sides of the border by walking or hopping across the falls.

I suppose after a number of weeks the interest started to die down, so on a certain morning Blondin shocked the onlookers by declaring that the following Saturday morning he would take a man across the falls in a wheelbarrow...

Finally, the morning came, and Blondin stopped by a local pub for some breakfast (or courage, ha!) on his way to the falls. As he entered, he overheard some men arguing and drew closer to investigate.

‘I *believe* he can do it,’ yelled a man with his back to the door. ‘I guarantee he can. In fact, I will bet anyone here \$100 that Blondin can cross the falls safely pushing a man in a wheelbarrow.’

Imagine that man's surprise when Blondin tapped him on the shoulder and said, ‘I am so glad you have faith in me because I need someone to get in the wheelbarrow.’

Do you think the man did? Of course he didn't, *yet he said he believed.*”

And then MacDonald adds, “That is the great problem in our day. So many people say they believe God's Word but when it gets right down to ‘getting in the wheelbarrow,’ they refuse; therefore they do not believe! Faith is getting in the wheelbarrow. Faith is staking your life and your happiness on God's truth. Anything less is sentiment. It does not save, and it most certainly does not transform.”[\[2\]](#)

Let me say it again, we experience victory in the battle when we put on Christ (not just *say* it but actually do it). So be honest. Have you really placed your faith in (that is, put on) Christ? And if you have, are you really placing your faith in (putting on) Christ now? Are you getting in the wheelbarrow every day?

Here's a third conviction we must affirm after we've changed...

3. *We are saved to serve God and others.*

God doesn't enable us to kick harmful habits merely so we can feel better and enjoy life more. Remember, change is about Him, not merely me. He helps us so we can in turn serve Him and others.

1 Peter 4:10 Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.

Peter refers to a *gift* here. If you received Christ as your Savior you received a spiritual deposit, a very special kind of *gift* from God. It's a supernatural ability that God has given you. And what's it for? Peter says God gave it to us so we can *serve others*.

We've studied these gifts before. Some have the gift of teaching, others the gift of mercy, still others the gift of discernment, and still others the gift of evangelism. The gifts differ but the fact that all of us have a gift is the same. And what we have we are to use for the good of others.

What happens if I don't use my gift? The Body of Christ suffers, and that includes me. Conversely...

****If I am serving, the Body benefits, including me.**

We have a church van. About a year ago one of the trustees said to me, "Our van has been sitting a lot lately. Feel free to drive once in awhile. Things will start breaking if it's not used." The fact is, that's true not only of church vans but of church members. God didn't save and gift us so we could sit, but so we can serve Him and His people. When I serve the Body benefits, but the byproduct is that I benefit, too. Indeed, serving is essential for lasting change.

There's something else we need *after* we've changed...

4. *We need a spiritual fitness plan.*

About five years ago my father-in-law was feeling poorly. Something wasn't right with his health. The doctors determined there were blockages and proposed heart by-pass surgery. It was a serious time for our family, but thankfully the doctors were able to restore blood flow to the heart by taking good veins from the leg and using them to bypass the blockage in the heart.

After the docs restored my father-in-law to good health they began to talk with him about how to *maintain* that good health. They gave him a fitness plan that included a change in diet, regular exercise, and accountability.

What's true concerning our physical health is also true concerning our spiritual health. We need a fitness plan, and God's Word gives us one. Here it is...

The moment we received Christ as our Savior, the Holy Spirit took up residence in us. My body is His temple (1 Cor 6:19). He seals us (Eph 1:13). He guides us using His Word (John 16:13). He produces the fruit of Christ in us (Gal 5:22-23). He fills us so we can live a new life (Eph 5:18). Jesus said He would be “Another Counselor” (John 14:16-17). In other words, what Jesus Himself was to the twelve disciples the Holy Spirit is to us. He is our counselor. He is our coach.

Anybody here not eat breakfast? Probably a few people. Anybody here not eat anything yesterday? Anybody here that hasn't eaten in the past three days? I doubt it. If you hadn't eaten anything in three days you probably would feel like being here today.

Eating food matters. Eating good food matters. You may be healthy today, but if you fail to take in proper nourishment you will lose your good health.

Why do we often feel sluggish, even weak as Christians? Many times the answer is very simple. We haven't been eating properly. This is so basic but it's a non-negotiable. In order to maintain spiritual health we need a proper diet that provides spiritual nourishment.

Proper diet: A continual feeding on God's Word, including a daily quiet time, Scripture memory, and Bible study

Each of those sources of spiritual nutrition are vital. Do you have a daily plan for reading and digesting God's Word? Are you following the plan? How about memorizing Scripture? The psalmist asked the question in Psalm 119:9, “How can a young man keep his way pure?” Here's the answer he gave, “By living according to your word.” So his resolve? Verse 11 “I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.”

But good diet isn't enough. If all we do is take nutrition in, what will happen? We'll eventually become sluggish. Something else is necessary...

Exercise: Serve as a part of the Body of Christ

Exercise is to physical health what serving is to spiritual health. If someone is a pew-sitter, he is more susceptible to spiritual disease than is the person who is joyfully serving. He can become discouraged, disillusioned with the Christian life, even embittered. What's need? He needs exercise.

By the way, if you haven't been exercising you start slowly and build up or you'll harm yourself. The same goes spiritually speaking. Don't sign up for every ministry in the church or you'll have a spiritual heart attack! Just tell the Lord, “I'm willing to serve,” and then start looking for needs you can meet.

There's one more component in this fitness plan...

Accountability: Develop meaningful relationships in a local church

God's so good. He knows we're prone to get discouraged. That's one of the reasons He gave us the church. I need you. You need me. In order to stay spiritually fit, we need to build meaningful relationships in the context of our local church.

So there it is, God's preventative maintenance plan. After we've changed, beware of wrong thinking and keep affirming and practicing the truth. One more thing as we conclude...

Remember the Bottom Line: When it comes to changing, it's all about

**Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

[2] James MacDonald, pp. 175-6.