

“How to Change—Or Can I?” A Biblical Framework for Change—part 4**

God is in the business of changing people.

Several years ago He gave us as a church a powerful reminder that He is seeking and saving the lost in this world. It happened on a Sunday evening. Just prior to the beginning of our 6:00 evening worship service a couple came through the front doors and entered the foyer. I met them and we chatted briefly. I learned they were from Utah and that they were on their honeymoon.

That obviously raised the question, “Why would you come from Utah to Wheelersburg on your honeymoon? We’re not exactly a romantic getaway for newlyweds!”

They smiled and told me their story. They picked their honeymoon spot by taking out a map, closing their eyes, and dropping a finger on the map. The spot it hit would be the place they’d honeymoon. The spot happened to be a small town near Morehead , KY.

But there’s more. They decided they wanted to get their picture in Ohio so they drove to the Greenup Dam bridge and there saw the sign to “ Wheelersburg , Ohio .” Our town caught the fellow’s eye because he has a cousin named Jason Wheeler. The couple decided they must visit this town of Wheelersburg .

Once arriving in Wheelersburg the newlyweds decided they would attend a church service if they could find one and it just so happened that they arrived in town and at our church on Sunday evening a few minutes before our 6:00 service would begin.

There’s more. During the service that night we just happened to be studying a portion of God’s Word that addressed several key issues this couple had been thinking about (concerning the person and work of Jesus), which they mentioned to me on the way out. As you might have guessed this couple from Utah was Mormon.

I’ve never seen that couple again. Was their presence here that evening in 2000 a mere coincidence? No, it was not. God is sovereign and in His grace He wanted that couple to hear the truth about His Son. Yes, God is in the business of reaching lost sinners for His glory. That was true of the couple from Utah . That’s true for you this morning.

God is in the business of changing people.

But how does He do it? That’s the question we’ve been seeking to answer for several weeks now. How do we change? We’ve been investigating God’s Word to find out what God says concerning six issues related to personal change.

Review: We began by pondering...

I. The Need to Change

Who needs to change? We all do and here are four foundational realities that explain why. Since we’ve developed these in earlier studies, I’ll merely mention them now.

- A. God is Creator and wrote the Owner's Manual.**

- B. We are sinners and have missed the mark.**

- C. Jesus Christ is the one who makes change possible.**

- D. Jesus Christ is the model for change.**

If we need to change, why don't we? For many reasons but here's a primary one...

II. Some Faulty Views about How We Change

If I believe false notions about change, I *won't change*. We looked at three examples...

The "Holy Zap" view

Some people are seeking a zap from God that will transform them. That's why they don't change, because they don't seek the zap hard enough, or they do seek it but God won't zap them, or they get zapped and it wears off.

The "Let go and let God" view

The reason they don't change, they've been told, is because THEY keep getting in the way. "If you were totally surrendered to God, you'd change!"

The "Pull up your bootstraps" view

It's the old, "God helps those who help themselves" notion.

There are other faulty views about change but these are three of the predominant ones that prevent us from changing as we ought. One of the biggest barriers to lasting change is the failure to grasp the next fundamental issue...

III. The Process of Change: Ephesians 4:17-5:21

Change is a process. What's involved? According to Ephesians 4-5 there are seven steps you must take if you're serious about changing.

Step #1: You must know Christ (20).

Personally. He must be your Savior and Lord. Apart from Christ you do not have the ability to change in ways that please God.

Step #2: You must be growing in your knowledge of the truth (21).

Jesus said, "You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free (John 8:32)." We cannot apply what we do not know.

Step #3: You must "put off" the thinking and lifestyle of the old man (22).

The old must go, including every thought and deed that doesn't resemble Christ. It must be stripped off like filthy rags.

Step #4: You must "put on" the thinking and lifestyle of the new man (24).

If we are in Christ we are a new creation. Remember, Jesus is the model for change, therefore, we must take concrete steps to think and look like Him.

Step #5: You must be renewing your mind (23, also 17-19).

"Be made new in the attitude of your minds," Paul told the Ephesians.

Step #6: You must take specific steps to replace the old with the new (4:25-5:7).

Step #7: You must realize the battle doesn't end until we see the Lord (5:8-21).

In order to change, we need a warfare mentality. Our foe is crafty, our desires deceitful. We must invest every ounce of our strength (which God of course provides) to get rid of sin and get in the steps of our Savior.

The following story illustrates the point: "There once was a man who lived on top of a very high

mountain. Because of an old war injury, he needed to hire someone to take his little daughter up and down the mountain each day for school. Quite a few people applied for the position. He asked each only one question: 'How close can you come to the edge of the mountain without going over?'

One brash fellow said, 'I can come within 12 inches.'

'That's nothing,' said another. 'I can come within six inches.'

Still another boasted, 'I can come within an inch.'

Standing quietly alone was a simple man. When his turn came, he replied, 'There is no way I am going near the edge. I am staying on the clear path for dear life.' He got the job."[\[2\]](#)

A lot of folks today seem to think that living on the edge is a sign of spiritual maturity. It's not. It's a slippery slope that leads to sin, for which reason God says we are to put as much distance as we can between us and sin. *Put off* and *put on*.

Thankfully, we don't have to fight this battle alone. When God saves us He places us in a community that assists us in the change process...

IV. The Environment for Lasting Change: The Local Church

God says I need the church. Why? By His design the church provides many essentials that facilitate change. Here are three.

A. The local church provides biblical encouragement.

1 Thessalonians 5:11 Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

Biblical encouragement involves meaningful interaction. There must be a connection. Which is why the church is the perfect place to find encouragement. We are connected! Because of what Christ did at the cross we have fellowship with God and fellowship with one another.

But encouragement doesn't just happen. It requires intentional action on each of our parts to do some things with each other.

1 Thessalonians 5:14 And we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone.

This verse makes it clear that not everyone in the church is the same. Our needs are different. Our spiritual aptitude is different at this point in the journey. Consequently, the way we treat each other should differ. The idle need to be warned, the timid encouraged, the weak need our help, and everyone needs our patience.

One of the reasons we often fail to change in lasting ways is that we try to fight the battle all on our own and ignore the great blessing of the church. God never intended that. He knows we need the church, for many reasons, and here's one, because the church provides biblical *encouragement* for change.

B. The local church provides accountability for change.

Galatians 6:1 Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.

God's kind of church not only teaches God's Word, but insists its people live according to God's Word. God knows I need that kind of accountability. So do you.

Titus 2:15 These, then, are the things you should teach. Encourage and rebuke with all authority. Do not let anyone despise you.

God's Word is not a book of suggestions. It's the authoritative revelation from God Himself to which we are to submit our lives. But sometimes we don't feel like submitting to it, even though God knows what's best for us. That's where the accountability of the church enters.

C. The local church provides the environment necessary for continued growth.

Hebrews 10:24-25 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

By God's design the church is like a greenhouse. Outside the church things die, but in the church there's potential for growth and fruitfulness.

Breaking new ground...

We need to address a very important question today and that's the question, "Why?" Why should we change?

A while ago a person in the community told me about a habit he was trying to break. His doctor was pretty blunt with him, assuring him that if he didn't change, his life was in danger. I told him I'd be praying for him. A few

weeks later I asked him how it was going and he informed me, rather sheepishly, that it wasn't going to well. I could tell he'd pretty much thrown in the towel. His doctor's pep talk had worn off. If he was going to change he needed a higher incentive.

He's not alone. Every person who's trying to change (and that includes every person!) needs to make sure he has the right answer to the question *why?* Why should I change? "What is the right answer?" you ask. The Bible tells us clearly...

V. The Purpose of Changing

Why should I change? The next statement may surprise you but it's true.

A. It's not really about me.

"What do you mean, it's not really about me? It's my life, isn't it? If I'm not pleased with my life then I need to change. But if I am pleased with my life, then I don't need to change. It's that simple."

Hold on. That kind of thinking leaves out someone, the one before whom we will all stand some day. Let the weight of this verse sink in...

Romans 11:36 For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever!
Amen.

The key word in the book of Romans is *righteousness*. Romans answers the question, "How can sinners like you and me be *right* with a holy God?" We find the straightforward answer in chapters 1-11. We discover that we cannot make ourselves right with God for we are *sinners* and we lack *righteousness* (that's chapters 1-3a). But the good news is that what we cannot earn God gives to us freely in His Son, Jesus Christ. Because of the cross, God now forgives sin and gives righteousness to all who will believe in Christ (that's chapters 3b-5). What's more, God then enables those who have received His Son's righteousness to change and live a righteous life that pleases Him (that's chapters 6-8). This is God's plan, beloved, a plan that God established in eternity past, a plan to form a righteous people for His glory (that's chapters 9-11).

That's what I mean when I say that change is really not about me. And this verse sums it up. According to Romans 11:36...

1. *Everything is from God.*

He's the source of everything.

2. *Everything is through God.*

He's the sustainer of everything.

3. *Everything is to God.*

He's the *summon bonum*, the purpose and goal of everything.

Suppose I borrowed your lawnmower. But then weeks passed and I didn't return it. So you came to my house and asked me about your mower. If I said, "Oh yea, the mower's in my garage. It works great. You can borrow it back if you want..." how would you respond?

You'd probably say something like, "Borrow it back? Hold on fellow. It's my mower. I graciously let you use it but it's still *MY* mower."

You'd be upset if I treated something that belonged to you as though it belonged to me, and rightly so. Know this. This is God's universe, not yours and not mine. I am living on borrow time and resources, and so are you. He's graciously given to us everything we call our own, including the breath we breathe this moment, but the fact is, everything is *from* Him, *through* Him, and *to* Him.

Back to the mower illustration. Suppose I did return your mower after I used it. But suppose I misused it and when I dropped it off, it had a huge dent in the side and it was covered with mud. How would you respond? You'd probably ask, "What'd you do to my mower?" If I replied, "Ah, it's nothing. Just normal wear and tear. No big deal."

You'd be upset and rightly so. Why? Because whether I think a big dent and some mud is acceptable ISN'T the issue. What's the issue? Whether YOU think it's acceptable. It's YOUR mower.

Again, since everything is *from* God, *through* God, and *to* God, the issue isn't whether I am pleased with my life. The issue is what? It's whether HE is pleased with my life. And if He's not pleased, I need to change.

But why? If God is so great (and He is), what is it about my life that concerns Him? In other words, why does He even care whether I change or not? 1 Corinthians 10:31 tells us...

1 Corinthians 10:31 So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

Paul wrote the letter of 1 Corinthians to followers of Christ living in the city of Corinth. Why did he write the letter? Simply put, because these followers of Christ *weren't following Christ*. There were some areas out of whack in their lives: they had cliques in the church; members were suing other church members in the civil courts; one man was living in sexual sin and the rest of the church was tolerating it; and that's not all.

Yes, this church had problems and the believers there needed to change. The change wasn't necessary simply because THEY didn't like the way things were. The change was necessary because GOD wasn't pleased.

In chapters 8-10 Paul confronted the subject of questionable practices. Some church members were eating food that had been sacrificed to pagan idols. They did so even though their actions were offending other brothers and sisters who used to worship those idols. The problem was dividing the church. Somebody needed to change.

What solution did Paul offer? It's summed up in 1 Corinthians 10:31. According to 1 Corinthians 10:31...

4. *Everything we do matters to God.*

We tend to view some activities as “sacred” and others as “secular.” Singing in church, reading your Bible, teaching a children’s Sunday School class—those are *sacred* and God is interested in them. But turning a metal lathe at the plant, playing a round of golf, weeding your garden—those are *secular* activities and God doesn’t care about them.

Wrong! Wrong! Wrong! God is concerned about everything we do 24-7. That includes what we choose to eat and drink. Let me put it as bluntly as I can...

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

Paul says, “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.” To do something for God’s glory is to do it in a way that brings honor to God. Can I bring honor to God while I am weeding my garden? Sure. How? By thanking Him for the produce, by using the nourishment those vegetables provide to live the kind of life that pleases Him, not to mention by sharing some of the harvest with others in need.

By the way, can I do a “sacred” activity, like singing in church, and it NOT be for the glory of God? Sadly, it happens all the time when we mouth words we really don’t mean.

Yes, everything we do in a day’s time—and I mean *everything*—is either done for the glory of God OR for some other reason.

Let’s apply this to a habit you may be trying to break. The question again is *why*. Suppose you’re trying to lose 20 pounds. Why? You might think, “So other people will approve of me,” and if so, your motive is off target. Or you might think, “I want to lose 20 pounds so I’ll be healthier,” and although your motive isn’t bad, it’s still deficient. What’s the right motive? It’s this. “I want to shed 20 pounds so that my life brings glory to God.”

By the way a person could say, “I don’t want to change. I’m pleased with my life just the way it is,” and *still need to change*. Why? Because when it comes to change, it’s really not about me. Rather...

B. It’s about God and His Son.

There are four truths about God that you need to know if you’re going to approach change in the right way.

1. *God created us for Himself.*

In the letter to the Ephesians Paul develops this point...

Ephesians 1:11-12 In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory.

It's all about God, beloved. In eternity past God chose to save a people. Why? He predestined a people to be His. Why? For the praise of His glory. Right now He is forming that people, a new humanity comprised of sinners who were once separated from Him and each other, but now are reconciled to Him and each other through the cross of His Son and the reconciling work of His Spirit. That's the message of Ephesians 1-3. I exist for the praise of His glory.

**I do not create my own meaning in life. I already have one.

Let's develop that statement further. What is my meaning for existence? Once again, it's something God is doing...

2. *God's agenda is to form a people that resemble and praise His Son.*

Ephesians 4:24 ...and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

It's been said that imitation is one of the highest forms of flattery. The fact is, God loves His Son and is expressing that love in a very tangible way. He is forming a people who resemble His Son. He wants us to be like God. "You mean like Him in His power?" Paul says we are created to be like Him "in true righteousness and holiness."

How important is that agenda in God's eyes? So important that...

3. *God orchestrates everything to accomplish His agenda for us.*

Romans 8:28-29 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose...

This verse is familiar, but note the particulars. *And we know*—we have absolute confidence about something. What's that? That *in all things God works for the good* of His people. What does "all things" mean? Does it refer to your job promotion? Yes. Does it refer to your job firing? Yes. Does it refer to your successful surgery? Yes. Does it refer to your terminal disease? Yes. We know that in *all things* God is working for our good.

But what is that *good* that He has in mind? Verse 29 tells us...

...For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

God's purpose is to form a people who are like His Son. That's the good He has in mind, to transform sinners into the likeness of Christ.

Which raises the question, *what is His Son like?* The Scriptures tell us. Think about the life of Jesus Christ...

When He was attacked, He did not retaliate but responded in love.

When He was tired from a hard day of ministry, He still made time with His Father a priority, even if it meant losing sleep.

When tempted to live for this world, He quoted Scripture and said, "Worship the Lord your God and serve Him only."

When He saw a person in need, He got involved to meet the need.

When He saw someone in sin, He reached out to set them free.

When He faced a difficult decision, like going to the cross, He resolved, "Not my will but Thine be done."

Beloved, that's what Christ did. And that's what God wants us to be like, to resemble Him. And that's why He sends things into our lives, even unpleasant things, "all things," not to harm us, but to accomplish His good agenda for us, so we will change and become like His Beloved Son.

You say, "But I don't have what it takes to be like Christ." That's not true, not if you know Christ.

4. God has given us everything we need to experience His agenda for us.

2 Peter 1:3-4 His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

Please remember. God's agenda is not to help us be what WE want to be. It's to help us be what HE wants us to be.

I found a quote attributed to C. S. Lewis that illustrates this point: "When I was a child, I often had a toothache, and I knew that if I went to my mother, she would give me something which would deaden the pain for that night and let me get to sleep. But I did not go to my mother--at least not till the pain became very bad. And the reason I did not go was this: I did not doubt she would give me the aspirin; but I knew she would also do something else. I knew she would take me to the dentist the next morning. I could not get what I wanted out of her without getting something more, which I did not want. I wanted immediate relief from my pain; but I could not get it without having my teeth set permanently right. And I knew those dentists; I knew they would start fiddling about with all sorts of other teeth which had not yet begun to ache. Our Lord is like the dentists. Dozens of people go to him

to be cured of some particular sin. Well, he will cure it all right, but he will not stop there. That may be all you asked; but if you once call him in, he will give you the full treatment.”

Yes, God offers us the *full treatment* to accomplish His good agenda for us.

Sum It up: So what’s the purpose of change? It’s not really about me. It’s all about God and His Son.

Several years ago a man stopped by my office. “I want to get saved,” he said. “Can you help me?” That’s a great question to hear but on this occasion I found myself being just a little skeptical.

“You want to be saved, huh?” I returned.

“Yes, sir. Right now. I’m ready,” he replied.

I began to review what the Bible says about salvation, that in order to be saved you must first admit you are *lost*—“Yep, I believe that,” he responded, a little too quickly it seemed.

And then I told him about Jesus Christ, the perfect Son of God who came on a mission to rescue lost sinners and restore them to God. “Jesus died on the cross to pay the penalty of sin for every person who will repent and believe in Him,” I shared. To which he quickly said, “Yes, I believe. I want to be saved.”

I asked him if he wanted to pray and confess Jesus Christ to be His Savior and Lord. Again, without hesitation he said, “Yes.”

And so he prayed, and then I prayed. Then I began to explain, “The Bible teaches that when a person enters the family of God he enters as a baby, and as such he needs spiritual nourishment in order to grow.” I offered to help him get started, to show him how to read the Bible, how to pray, etc.

But just moments before he couldn’t wait to “get saved,” it was obvious that now he couldn’t wait to leave. He cut me off and said, “Thanks, but I’ve got to go.”

“Why the hurry?” I asked.

“I’ve got to get to court right away,” he said. “My divorce hearing will begin shortly.”

Motive matters, my friends. When you say you want to change, the question is *why*. Is your motive to please God and be His kind of person, or is it simply to use God to get something else you want?

Answer these questions...

Why did you “get saved?” Was it merely to escape the punishment of hell or did you really want to become God’s kind of person?

Why do you want to change this morning? Is it because you are tired of your life and the consequences of your choices, or is it because you really want God’s agenda to be accomplished in your life? Do you really want to seek first His kingdom, to glorify Him, and you realize that the habits that enslave you are robbing Him?

A Personal Question: Whose agenda matters most in

my life?

Since NONE of us perfectly resemble Christ yet, ALL of us need to change today. Therefore, let's take inventory...

1. What needs to change MOST in order for me to become more like Christ?

When it comes to change we can get overwhelmed. "I fall short in so many areas," we think. Well, don't focus on "so many areas." Focus on the one area where change is needed *most*. Then get serious about changing in that area, all to the glory of God. Here are areas to consider...

☐ The way I spend my time

☐ The priorities that govern my life

☐ The friends I keep

☐ The things I look at and listen to

☐ The attitudes in my heart

☐ The way I treat people

☐ What else?

2. What step do I need to take TODAY in order to become more like Christ?

Change either begins or doesn't begin *today*. It's time to take that step.

Next time: "Once Change Takes Place , Then What?"

****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.

[\[2\]](#) Taken from *Israel My Glory*, “Outrage at Gibeah: A Spiritual and Societal Breakdown,” September/October 2005, p. 14.