

Be Transformed

Romans 12:2

In Romans 12:2 Paul gives us a command which when fulfilled can bring about tremendous joy and peace in our lives. “*And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.*” “Transformed” is translated from the Greek word from which we get metamorphosis. It means to change into another form, to transfigure. It describes what a butterfly goes through in the cocoon as it *transforms* from a caterpillar larva to a beautiful butterfly. This is the kind of change we are able to undergo as Christians if we take seriously the command given here by Paul and if we seek diligently after the righteousness that is in God’s word. Through Christ we are changed as our sins are washed clean. And through His strength and instruction we are able to continue that transformation to our physical bodies so that we can become new people, better people, holy people for God (1 Pet. 2:4-5, 9-10). But we must be willing to change if any of this is going to come to pass.

The Need for Change

Change is perhaps one of the most difficult things to accomplish in our lives. We all develop habits and behaviors which are hard to change and are stubborn at best. These habits and behaviors give us our personality. They make up how we think, act, and live. They include how we respond to people and situations. They also include the choices we make and activities we involve ourselves in. In a way, they make up who we are. Therefore when it comes to changing one or more of these behaviors it is like pulling teeth because, to us, they have become a part of our lives. In many cases, when something so familiar is taken away or changed a person can begin to feel a little disoriented and uncomfortable.

In spite of the difficulty of change, many of our behaviors were developed while we were living in the world, away from God, in disobedience to His word. Paul described it very well in Eph. 2:1-3, “...*in which you once walked according to the course of this world...*” All of us have fit this description at some point in time, “*for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*” (Rom. 3:23). Because of the nature of our sins and our sinful behaviors we have a dire need to put away from us those things which contradict God’s word.

All sin, no matter how much a part of us it has become, has the power to keep us out of heaven if we do not change! (1 John 3:3-6, 8). Sadly, there are many people who believe that they can continue living their lives the same way after becoming a Christian, but they are sorely mistaken. When Jesus instructed us on how to follow Him He said, “*If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it*” (Matt. 16:24-25). This means that when we become Christians we make a commitment to set aside our physical desires and sinful behaviors (deny ourselves) in order that we may fulfill the will of God and develop behaviors that reflect the character of God.

The Sin of Not Changing

There are many people who claim to follow Christ, who obey the gospel at first, but do not see the need to change in accordance with His will. They may call themselves Christians, but when they hear that they need to change something, they either ignore the instruction or, in some cases, they begin to view the message and the preacher with contempt and disdain.

But throughout the scriptures God has shown us the sinfulness of not changing in obedience to His word so that there can be no mistake.

- ☞ Matt. 7:21: Some were condemned because they did not do the will of the Father in heaven.
- ☞ Heb. 10:26: Those who continue to walk in sin after receiving the knowledge of the truth have nothing left that can save them from sin, seeing that they have rejected Christ.
- ☞ Ezek. 33:30-33: Jerusalem was destroyed because, even though Judah gladly receive the word of God, they did not act upon it.

How to Change

How do I make changes in my life?

When it comes to making changes in our lives, many of us have probably tried it only to have failed on several occasions. As a result some people have developed the idea that they will never be able to overcome their sins. They look at the road ahead of them and begin to develop a sense of hopelessness. Some have tried, but have decided that they do not want to give up what they are doing. It is what they have always done, it is what they are going to continue to do. In any case, many Christians are faced with challenges that prevent them from making the changes in their lives that God expects of His people. God understanding the difficulty of this and has given us all the tools we need to overcome sin. He shows us how to overcome and guides us through it with His word.

To begin with, God shows us the kind of behaviors that are evil and then shows us the kind of behaviors that are good. As a foundation is to a house, knowledge of God and His word is to overcoming sin. Thus the Psalmist wrote, “*Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against you*” (Psalm 119:9-12). Our goal as Christians is to replace the evil with the good. Like recording over an old video tape we are trying, in essence, to rewrite our thinking and establish new behaviors that are in harmony with God’s character. In the scriptures God describes this as putting off the old man and putting on the new. “*Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him*” (Col. 3:10).

But here again is our question, how do we do that? How do we change something that almost seems engrained into who we are? God shows us how in the Bible.

Desire

If we are going to change at all we have to want it. If you don’t want to change then you might as well go home because God isn’t going to force you to do something you don’t want to do. Our salvation is by choice, and so is our service to God. What made Moses such a devout servant of God? Because he made a choice; he made God His desire. Therefore it is written of him, “*By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of*

sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward” (Heb. 11:24-26).

If we don't have any real desire to do better; if we don't really want to give up the sin that is in our lives then nothing in the world can help us change. The thing that hinders most people from overcoming sin is that they still desire what they are trying to give up (James 1:14-15). In order to overcome this we have to change our desires. Like a person who is enjoying a certain meal until he asks what is in it. When he finds out he cannot bear to look at it any longer. So we must do with sin. Through knowledge of God's word we are able to learn the true nature of sin, we are able to abhor that which is evil. We are also able to learn the benefits of living a righteous life and desire that life, then nothing can stop us from attaining it.

Jesus said, “*Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened” (Matt. 7:7-8)*. After we have asked for help in overcoming sin desire is what motivates us to actively seek it. After we have sought to overcome sin our desire for righteousness is what motivates us to knock, to prove ourselves. And what we will find is that our simple desire to do better will eventually become an unwavering determination to conquer the sin that is in our lives, not only because our life depends on it, but because it feels great to put away the sin that has been plaguing us all of our lives. Soon we will find that there is far greater joy in conquering out weakness than in submitting to them.

But we have to desire it. We have to long for the things of God and reach for them with all of our heart. Next time you are tempted to sin, ask, “What is my desire?”

Call Sin for What It Really Is

While we live in sin our vision is blurred. But through the scriptures God is able to help us see clearly. When we look at our lives through the scriptures it is like putting on a pair of glasses and seeing our world clearly for the first time. What we are going to find is that our world is not as pretty as we once thought it was. What we once thought as cute or funny, the scriptures reveal as divisive, destructive behaviors.

Many people realize that this is what they see when they look at their life through the scripture and sadly, they avoid trying because they don't want to see. They don't want to see the truth about the way they are living. They want to feel like they are good people and that is good enough. But brethren, we cannot overcome sin with that kind of attitude. If we are going to be able to change, if God is going to be able to look at us and say “*I am not ashamed to be their God,*” Then we need to look at our life through the truth of the scriptures and call sin for what it really is. This is similar to the point that James makes in James 1:21-25. God's word is a mirror and when we look into it we see the kind of person we ought to be. But if we walk away from it then we forget what we should be like and we will never be able to change. We need to be as the Psalmist who wrote, “*I will set nothing wicked before my eyes; I hate the work of those who fall away; It shall not cling to me” (Psalm 101:3; see also Ps. 45:7)*.

No matter what sin we are dealing with we need to call it for what it is. We need to be enlightened by God's word and look at our lives clearly, and only then will we be able to take the proper steps to make necessary changes in our lives. This is what Paul meant in Rom. 12:2, “Be transformed by the **renewing** of your mind.” What sins are you struggling with? Selfishness, bitterness, smoking, alcohol, drugs, gossip, no zeal, (add to this list and describe each thing with

the harshness that God does in the Bible). Like dirt on our flesh, if we see the ugliness of our sins then we will want to wash them off with all of our might.

Cast Sin Away

Like an old torn garment we must cast our sins away from us with great determination. Eph. 4:22: “...*that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts.*” “...*knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with*” (Rom. 6:6). Some people like to ease out of their sins. But what happens? As we are easing out of our sins we become more comfortable as we go along so that we never really overcome all the way. We see that we are little better and then we become content with that. That is not the pattern God shows us in the scriptures. When Jesus instructed the sinful woman in [John 8:11](#) He did not say go and ease out of your sins and I will check up on you later on. He said, “God and sin no more.” Such should be our approach to sin. Do we have a problem with gossip? Rather than trying to decide what is and isn’t gossip when we are talking about other people we must throw it all away. Unless we are saying something good about a person who is not in our presence or praising them, we need to avoid talking about them at all. Smoking, burn the cigarettes, through them in the trash. The few dollars it cost to buy them is worth nothing compared to our souls.

Replace the Evil with the Good

Right now some might be saying, “Easier said than done,” or “That is a lot harder than it sounds.” Well, we knew from the start that overcoming was not going to be an easy road. Remember, Jesus said, “*Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it*” (Matt. 7:13). Overcoming our sins is going to be the hardest challenge we have ever faced or are going to face. The key, however, it to not be idle. A farmer does not till the ground and expect a garden to pop up. After he has tilled the ground he must then plant the seeds. And even after he has planted the seeds he must continually be tending the garden and pulling out the occasional weeds in order to keep his field clean and full of good fruit. If he lets the weeds go for a month, he is going to have a lot of work ahead of him trying to clean them up. It is the same when we are trying to make changes to our lives. Now we are an ugly, weed infested piece of ground and our dirt is hard and lumpy. When we turn to Christ and repent of our sins in sorrow and tears, we have plowed our field and made it ready. When we throw away the cigarettes, stop talking about other people, stopped complaining, stop treating other people badly, when we stop making excuses for not doing what we know we need to be doing, we are plowing our field, making our hearts ready. But guess what, we can’t just stop there. If that is all we do then what is going to happen? The weeds are going to come back. They are going to find some new freshly tilled ground and make their roots nice and deep and be harder than ever to clear out. So what must we do? We have to plant the seeds. We have to replace the bad behaviors with the good. Smoking is an addiction, but if we replace it with something that is good, then with some self-control anyone can overcome it. We can replace our gossiping with talking about the gospel. We can replace our yelling at people with blessing people. We can replace our laziness with diligence. Jesus made this very point in Matt. 12:43-45.

In our effort to overcome sin there is no room for idleness. When we are idle rot begins to set in. We are going to wobble and stumble and make mistakes, just like a toddler trying to walk. But

you know what, like a toddler we can keep on getting up and with each try we can become stronger, more stable. Eventually our walk will begin to resemble that of Christ. This is the lesson we learn in Eph. 4:12-16. When we first start to make changes to our lives we are going to be tossed to and fro, we are going to be carried about with much uncertainty, but we must keep our determination and attack our goal with the speed of a bull. Then we will be as Paul said, “...that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head – Christ” (Eph. 4:14-15).

Change is difficult, but the more we struggle through it the stronger, healthier and more beautiful we will become. Replace bad characteristics with good (Col. 3:8-11).

Benefits

Such sacrifice is not without its rewards. When we change our lives for the better; when we make sacrifices according to God’s will the benefits can be...God has the power to work in us. But the only way He can is if we submit ourselves completely to Him. We failed to do this in the first place, that is why we need salvation in Christ. But now Christ gives us a second opportunity to do what God created us to do. Benefits to self, benefits to church, benefits to others that we love. We labor and toil every day of our lives so that we can care for our families and enjoy this life which God has blessed us with. If we are willing to make such sacrifices for the physical blessings of this life, why then should we not also learn to make the necessary sacrifices so that we can enjoy the spiritual blessings as well. What we will find is that when we are enjoying the spiritual blessings as we ought to, then the physical blessings far better than before. Ps. 51:10-12; Ezek. 18:31-32; 36:26ff; Eph. 1:18 (the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints).

Conclusion

The transformation that we undergo in this life is a foreshadow of the ultimate transformation which we will under go when Christ returns (1 Cor. 15:50ff). Now we are putting away sin, bad attitudes, evil desires, causing our conduct to be incorruptible. But then we will put away our physical bodies and put on new bodies that will be incorruptible. But if we do not prepare ourselves; if we do not make the necessary changes in our lives now then we will not be able to join Christ when He comes. Paul understood this. That is why he said in Phil. 3:7-11, “Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ...that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection of the dead.” “If by any means...” That is our goal brethren. We are here today; we continue to gather together because we are all trying to achieve this goal and help one another do the same. If this is not your goal then why are you here? If this is your goal then understand that we need to be trying ever harder to transform our lives, to conform it to the image of Christ, so that “if by any means” we may attain to the resurrection of the dead. If that does not spark zeal in you; if it does not get your blood pumping and excitement raging about digging in and getting to work, then I do not know what will.

By David Phillips