

# How Do People Change?

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## I. Introduction

- A. Counseling is about helping people to change.
- B. The change we, as biblical counselors, seek is unique. Col. 1:28 I Tim. 1:5
- C. Unbiblical approaches to change (sanctification) will impede your spiritual growth.
  - 1. Mysticism.
  - 2. Deliverance ministry.
  - 3. Self improvement formulas.
  - 4. Moralism. Rom. 5:20 8:3 Gal. 3:3 4:9
  - 5. Passivism.
  - 6. The recovery movement blends several unbiblical approaches.
- D. The Bible sets forth a balanced perspective on how change takes place. Romans 6 John 15:1-11

## II. Change begins by understanding and applying the gospel.

- A. Some wrongfully start with the imperative -- what we must do for God, which leads to unbiblical moralism.
  - 1. Scripture begins with the indicative, what God has done for us in Christ, as the ground for imperatives. Ro. 1-11 Ephesians 1-3 Colossians 1-2
  - 2. Specific New Testament exhortations are grounded in the gospel. Eph. 4:20,24,32 5:2,25ff 6:6 Rom. 15:2-3,7
  - 3. Of course this implies that only Christians are able to change according to the will of God. Romans 8:5-8 14:23 Heb. 11:6
  - 4. What about cases in which unbelievers appear to change (i.e. lose weight, quit smoking, no longer drunkards)? Mt. 12:43-45 Rom. 14:23 I Co. 10:31 Heb. 11:6
  - 5. The change we need is inward and Godward. Mark 7:14-23 Col. 2:20-23
- B. We and our counselees need to comprehend that who we are in Christ is the basis for the changed lives we want to live. Romans 6:11 Col. 3:1ff II Pet. 1:3-4
  - 1. Some think of the gospel exclusively for justification, but don't see its relevance for sanctification. Gal. 3:3
  - 2. The gospel is just as important for your sanctification as it was for your justification.
  - 3. Some nouthetic counselors move too quickly to the imperative, without placing enough emphasis on who we are in Christ and how the gospel relates to change.
  - 4. Many counselees have a false identity in which they label themselves according to their past sin rather than their new identity in Christ. I Cor. 6:9-11 II Co. 5:17
  - 5. The first imperative in Romans is to consider your identity in Christ – remember who you are. Rom. 6:11 also see v. 3,6,9

- C. Understanding your union with Christ is the key to your growth in holiness. Ro. 6:1ff
  - 1. Paul anticipates an objection. Romans 6:1-2
    - a. If salvation is by grace, apart from works, why bother to be holy since the more we sin the more God's grace is displayed? v. 1 5:20
    - b. The gospel, rightly understood, promotes holiness. 6:2bff I Th. 4:3 Titus 2:14
  - 2. You can't go on sinning because you are united to Christ. 6:2b
  - 3. Your old self has died in union with Christ. v. 2b-4a,6 Col. 2:12 Ga. 2:20
  - 4. You died to sin in the same sense in which Jesus died to sin. v. 8-10 He. 7:27 9:12
  - 5. You are a new person, united with Christ in His resurrection. v. 4b-5,8
  - 6. You have been set free from slavery to sin to serve righteousness. v. 6-7,9b,15-22
  - 7. This is true of every believer.
  - 8. Now, live in light of who you are. v. 12-13
    - a. The fact that you are united with Christ does not mean that it is no longer possible for you to sin. 7:14ff Phil. 3:12
    - b. The point is that the power of sin over you has been broken.
    - c. Nor does it mean that you no longer need to pursue holiness and fight sin.
  - 9. How does this work itself out in practical terms?
  
- D. Other ways in which the gospel contributes to change (sanctification).
  - 1. We are able to bear fruit only through our union with Christ. Jo. 15:1-11 Ga. 2:20
  - 2. A key to change is to recognize that Christ is better than the idols which tempt us. Isa. 55:1-2 John 4:10 7:38 6:35,48-51 Gen. 39:9b Proverbs 9:1ff
  - 3. Comprehending God's love and grace to us motivates and enables us to show love and grace. I John 4:19

### III. We and our counselees are responsible to exert effort towards change.

- A. Some wrongfully stop with the indicative, declaring what God has done for us in Christ, while neglecting the imperatives of what God calls us to do.
  
- B. What is the use of biblical imperatives (God's law)?
  - 1. God's law shows us our need for Christ who alone meets God's standard and provides the righteousness we lack. Gal. 3:24 2:16 Phil. 3:9
  - 2. God's law also shows us how He desires His redeemed people to live. I Th. 4:1 Eph. 5:10 John 14:15
  
- C. Biblical examples.
  - 1. Immediately after telling us to consider our identity in Christ, Paul exhorts us to take action against the lusts of the flesh. Romans 6:12ff
  - 2. Jesus tells us what we must do in order to abide in Him. John 15:1-11
    - a. Have His Word in ourselves. John 15:3,7
    - b. Seek His glory in prayer. John 15:7
    - c. Obey His commandments. John 15:10 14:15 I Jo. 2:6
    - d. Love the brethren. John 15:12-13,17 I Jo. 2:10
  - 3. The typical pattern in many New Testament epistles is to begin with the indicative as the basis for the imperative. Rom. 12:1ff Eph. 4:1ff Col. 3:1ff
  - 4. Our responsibility and God's work in us are placed side by side. Phil. 2:12-13 4:13

5. The New Testament is filled with specific exhortations to actively fight sin and to faithfully and diligently pursue righteousness.
  - a. Put off sin (repent). Mt. 5:29-30 Eph. 4:17,22,25,28,29 Rom. 6:12-13a
  - b. Put on righteousness. Eph. 4:24,25,28b,29b Rom. 6:13b,19c 12:1ff
6. It is not enough to merely hear God's word or even to agree with it. We must do what God commands. Mt. 7:24-27 James 1:22

D. Our motive for obedience is crucial.

#### **IV. What determines when and whether change takes place?**

- A. We experience a variety of outcomes in our counseling.
- B. Sometimes change doesn't take place in the life of a counselee because he/she is not regenerate. John 15:2,6 Phil. 1:6 I John 2:3-4 Mt. 7:16ff
- C. Personal revival is like corporate revival: God sees fit to sovereignly work in powerful ways in the lives of His people at certain times. Jo. 3:8 15:5 Ps. 71:20 85:6
- D. God uses various means to accomplish change.
  1. His Word is a powerful agent for change. II Ti. 3:16-17 Heb. 4:12-13 Ps. 119:25 John 15:7
  2. We should pray for God to revive us and our counselees. Ps. 119:25,37,40,88,107,149,154,156,159
  3. Sometimes the Lord brings circumstances into our lives to change our course. Ps. 119:67,71 Heb. 12:4-11 John 15:2 James 1:2ff
  4. Sometimes God sends a Nathan to admonish us. Ro. 15:14 Ga. 6:1-2 II Sam. 12

#### **V. Conclusion**

- A. God wants us to change and to bear fruit for His glory. John 15:8
- B. The gospel is the key to change.
  1. Understand your union with Christ. Rom. 6:11
  2. Abide in Christ. John 15:1ff
  3. Delight in Christ. Isa. 55:1-2
- C. We are responsible to exert effort to change.