

How Do People Change?

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.**