

*"In the past 50 years, people with mental problems have spent untold millions of hours in therapists' offices, and millions more reading self-help books, trying to turn negative thoughts like "I never do anything right" into positive ones like "I can succeed." For many people, including well-educated, highly trained therapists, for whom "cognitive restructuring" is a central goal, the very definition of psychotherapy is the process of changing self-defeating attitudes into constructive ones. But was Norman Vincent Peale right? Is there power in positive thinking? A study just published in the journal Psychological Science says **trying to get people to think more positively can actually have the opposite effect: it can simply highlight how unhappy they are**" (Emphasis mine).*

John Cloud¹

"...by making life easier for ourselves in minimizing the nature and seriousness of our sin, we become greater victims of it. We are in fact not healing ourselves. Those who say that they already feel bad enough without being told about the corruptions of indwelling sin misread the path to peace. When our people have not been taught well about the real nature of sin and how it works and how to put it to death, most of the miseries people report are not owing to the disease, but it's symptoms.

John Piper

Intro

There are literally thousands of programs in our culture that promise change. From fad diets and workout programs, to self-help philosophies and Viagra, we are promised that our lives will change as a result of using their product, eating their foods, and believing their program. A lot of this has to do with what you desire to change. If you are overweight and out of shape, then a good diet and workout program may be just what you want. If you're feeling down, then maybe counseling or a self-help program may provide some relief, but when it comes to our spiritual life, the bible doesn't offer a self-help program, or even a promise that our depression and doldrums will go away as a result of belief in Jesus. The bible is concerned with humanities real problem; sin! So many of us come to Jesus for personal fulfillment and transformation. The "Good News" as we have seen it is that in spite of my sin and ongoing imperfection, Christ has died in my place for that sin, and I can have eternal life in spite of my sin. So often we place our own "Personal" testimony before the gospel, when our life's transformation will never be perfected on this side of eternity. So it is important to remember that our transformation is ongoing, and our "Good Works" are made possible by the saving atonement of Jesus.

Religion Doesn't Help Anyone Become Holy

(Colossians 2:20-23)

It only appears to be that way. Because we are so bent on being our own gods, it appears natural that piety brings on real holiness, because it is the individual who is doing something, not necessarily anything that God is needed for. Paul reminds us that piety ("Self-Abasement") is of *"No use against **fleshly indulgence.**"* The word for *"Fleshly Indulgence"* (Plasmonē Sarx) literally means the things that "Satisfy" or "Fill" our desires. What Paul is saying is that these deep seated desires cannot be thwarted by acts of piety, that do nothing to change the human heart, but only produce more actions that satisfy the flesh, because they are a result of human activity, and not of the atoning work of Christ and the Holy Spirit in our lives. Pious acts gives us the powerful feeling that we are holy and righteous, while our hearts sins lie dormant at the core of our being, waiting for opportunities to crush us. This is why religious people struggle to repent, because they either are too proud to admit their sin, or too devastated by their sin to acknowledge God's forgiving love through His Son's work on the cross.

So if works of righteousness does not save us, what does save us? If it's God's grace, then why should we really care about growing in grace, and being changed at all? That's precisely the rhetorical question that Paul asks in Romans 6:1. I hope to be able to take a stab at that answer in the next two weeks as we look at "How the Gospel Changes Us." Today there are three key realities that we need to know in order to begin to be transformed by God's grace.

From the Head...

The Need For Change is Realized By Understanding The Depth of Our Sin (Romans 6:16)

Humanities problem is poor worship! We are enslaved to worshipping the wrong gods. As Martin Luther reminds us, we are *"Idol Makers"* constantly breaking the 1st command. Everyone is living for something to make them happy, or to give them security, value or identity. The way we get these things enslaves us to them. **Verse 12** shows us that we are enslaved to our *"lusts"* (Desires/epithumia). This word does not necessarily mean desires that our unhealthy or even evil, but it gets to the issue that causes us to sin; desires run amuck! This goes far beyond our actions, and the changing of our behavior, but forces us to go deep into the recesses of our own hearts.

¹ *Yes, I Suck: Self-Help Through Negative Thinking*, Time Magazine Online, July 8th, 2009
<http://www.time.com/time/printout/0,8816,1909019,00.html>

Change Begins When We Are United In Christ

(Romans 6:3-5)

When Paul begins to answer verse one, He reminds them of their union with Jesus' death and resurrection. We are connected to His past and the future in Him. It is this resurrection power that gives us the ability to "Walk in the newness of life." What does he mean? There is a term that theologians use to describe what happens to the human heart at the time of repentance; it is "Regeneration (Palingenesis)" The term is used only two times in the NT. The **first** is found in **Matthew 19:28** where Jesus uses it to talk about the final age when He sits on the throne, and His people will sit with Him. The word "*Regeneration*" was a term used by the stoics to speak of a time when fire periodically comes to earth to "Purge" the cosmos of evil. It is a term of great upheaval and change. The **second** time it is used is found in **Titus 3:5**, where Paul is telling Titus that we are saved "*Not on the basis of deeds we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of the of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit.*" Our union in Christ brings this type of change to our human hearts. As we will see, it doesn't immediately wipe out the presence of sin in our lives, but we have been freed from its enslaving power in our lives. What's important to note here: Salvation is not inner peace, or personal enlightenment, or self-improvement, it is about Jesus as our savior.

Change Continues As We live Out Our Identity Daily

(Romans 6:6)

As we continue on in Christ, we live out the gospel and our new identity in Jesus. This is an ongoing aspect in our life, as we grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. We continue our walk in the same manner we came to Christ; by faith (See **Colossians 2:6-7**; Galatians 3:1-3). We trust that Christ saves us, we trust that He forgives us, we trust He changes us (**Philippians 1:6**) and we trust that He is good and loves us.

... to the Heart

We need to understand that we aren't justified in any way by the law. Law shows us our need for Christ, but it doesn't save us. Being a nicer person or better husband doesn't make you closer to God; we are made righteous and are close to God because of the gospel. Legalism is appealing to us because it **first**, makes holiness manageable, and **secondly**, makes holiness our own achievement (See **Philippians 3:4-9**). We need to repent of our righteousness, just as much as our need is to repent of our unrighteousness. Change begins with a repentance that leads to hope in the forgiving gospel of our Lord! When we recognize our sin, it is then we can take it to Jesus, and be forgiven for it (**1 John 1:9**).

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