

Change Is Hard ... But Possible

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It's that time of year again. Perhaps a few pounds heavier from holiday treats, a bit out of shape because of winter doldrums, a little guilty from materialistic gluttony of Christmas shopping, our aching conscience drags us to the start/finish line of New Year's Eve and chides us into making life-altering resolutions.

But we go reluctantly because of the painful memories of past resolutions gone unfulfilled. Our aims are noble, but the part of the problem is that we often attempt change from the *outside only*. That is, we sign up with a health club or vow to resume our daily Bible reading program or pledge to have more people in our home, only to see these good intentions peter out by mid-February.

Self-improvement is just that – the attempt to change ourselves by relying on our own resources: will-power, creativity, discipline, etc. And we may win a little skirmish here or there by such efforts, but for most of us permanent, healthy change remains “out there” somewhere in the imaginary future of New Year's resolutions or “one of these days.” We just aren't strong enough to do it on our own.

The kind of meaningful change that will bring us closer to God is *inward*. It begins with attitudes and motives and objectives that are generated by the revelation of God. When we truly believe who God is and what He has done for us in Christ; when we see ourselves in all our frailty and weakness; when we truly understand that our *eternal welfare is at stake*, we will begin to unravel the “secret” of true change.

No one has undergone deeper life-changes than Paul. But such change only came when he finally realized that hope for true change did not lie in his own power but in the power of God: “*O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God – through Jesus Christ our Lord!*” (Rom 7:24-25).

Later, Paul urges the Romans (and us): “*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*” (Rom 12:2). Again, true change begins in the inner man, the thoughts and motives and affections.

Peter understood that a mind educated in the true nature of things would affect the way men choose to live. Accepting the terminal condition of this world, Peter concluded: “*Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God ...*” (2 Pet 3:11-12).

Consider this ray of truth Paul shines on the Corinthians (and us), who so desperately needed change in their lives: “*Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit ... and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's*” (1 Cor 6:19-20). The highest motivation does not come from self-determination but the knowledge that we belong to God.

The basis for true, inner change is truth, and God has revealed the truths that can bring spiritual renewal. If we commit our souls to God and His truth, we will gradually be “*transformed into the same image from glory to glory*” (2 Cor 3:18).