

CHANGE: The Goal of Biblical Counseling

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I have observed through the years that people go to counselors for different reasons. Some just want to talk and dump some things that are bothering them. Sixty percent of counseling success relates to the counselor being a good listener. Some go to counseling in order to change others; it's not their problem, but it's someone else who has the problem. Some persons come to counseling reluctantly because another person, sometimes the spouse or parent, has insisted.

Secular, and some so-called Christian counseling, find numerous clients, who are willing to pay for drawn out session where personal change is not the goal. Biblical counseling has as its primary goal, CHANGE. No, this doesn't mean that there may not be times where a "good visit" with a counselor will not be helpful.

People, as a rule, don't like change. It has been said that the only person who enjoys a change is a baby with a dirty diaper. A comedian said, "I once thought about change, but I didn't like it, so I changed my mind." It is ironic that change is the most constant in life; yet, it is resisted the most. This resistance starts in the cradle and continues to the grave.

FAILURE TO CHANGE:

In a VitaSmart Video on YouTube (2-4-11), titled *Why We Fail to Change Our Behavior*, the following statistics were presented showing how difficult it is for people to change:

- ✓ *98% fail to keep New Year's resolutions to change bad habits.*
- ✓ *70% of Americans who pay off credit card debt with a home equity loan end up with same or higher debt in two years.*
- ✓ *Americans spend \$40 billion a year on diets, but 19 out of 20 lose nothing but money.*
- ✓ *The average alcohol or drug abuser who tries to quit is back at it within four to thirty-two days.*
- ✓ *Marriage counseling saves fewer than one in five couples on the brink of divorce.*

It needs to be stressed over and over that the major goal of biblical counseling is CHANGE. A counseling session that doesn't have change as the end result, isn't true biblical counseling. One of the rags against counseling—even biblical counseling—is, "I've tried counseling and it

didn't work. All we did was talk." I once read a statistic where 5000 people were studied relative to the subject of change. 4400 people failed to change; only 600 were successful in changing.

While I may not like change, most of us need, at one time or another, to make a change. Then there are those who try to change, but with no success. There are some who believe that man is the product of "predestination" and cannot change even if he wants to. The Gospel message affirms that God believes so strongly in man's ability to change, an ability he placed in man, that He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, in an effort to communicate to mankind that he can change and be reconciled to God. He can be transformed "into the image of Christ", and "become an imitator of God" (Ephesians 5:1).

When it comes to change there are some popular replies: (1) I know I need to change. (2) I want to change. (3) I can't change. (4) Why can't I change? (5) I tried to change, but failed. (6) I can change, but I don't want to change. (7) I'm in any hurry to change.

EXCUSES FOR NOT MAKING CHANGES:

1. *I am too old to change.*
2. *I am too young to change.*
3. *I am too set in my ways to change.*
4. *Others will take advantage of me if I change.*
5. *It won't be the real me if I change.*
6. *I don't know how to go about making the change.*
7. *It's not me that needs to change; it is_____ .*

SOME THINGS A PERSON MAY NEED TO CHANGE:

1. A particular habit, such as drug or alcohol abuse.
2. A routine may need to be changed.
3. A relationship may need changing.
4. A behavior may need changing.
5. An attitude may need changing.
6. A belief may need changing.
7. A world view may need changing.

8. A lifestyle may need changing.
9. A spiritual practice may need to be changed.
10. A practice of making excuses for not changing.
11. A reluctance to asking others for help to change.
12. A refusal to accept and apply God's work to the change issue.

INFLUENCES THAT PREVENT OR HINDER CHANGE:

Isn't it ironic that a person can want to change with "all his heart" and yet not be able to do so? There may be numerous reasons why this is so, but one major reason is INFLUENCE. And one of the major influencers preventing change is the people we associate with. We tend to mirror those with whom we associate with on a constant basis. Therefore, we don't make changes because we lack support from friends and family. Having obese friends increases our chances of being obese by 75%. You are likely to spend more on a shopping spree with friends than if you shop by yourself. One-third of couples' decision to divorce come from encouragement by friends. This is why we must guard against the influence we allow others to have in our lives. It is also a major reason why we must practice the "One another" passages in God's counseling manual. This provides positive help, influence, and strength for making real changes that may be needed.

Jesus taught that numerous things influence our failure to change; all of them relate to the condition of the heart. In the Parable of the Sower, in Luke 8:4-15, Jesus discusses four types of soil (hearts) and how they respond, with only one out of four bearing acceptable fruit. The first heart fails because of the Devil: *Those by the wayside are the ones who, then the devil comes and takes away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved (Luke 8:12). Satan is a "roaring lion" out to seek whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8).* Remember how he influenced our great-grandmother, Eve?

THE BIBLE AND CHANGE

From Genesis to Revelation the Bible is about change. It is about not changing what is right and good; it is about changing what is wrong to what is right. This is preventive and corrective. Change as taught from a biblical perspective is based on several truths:

1. God knows what is best for us. Therefore, we must desire to obey His counsel.

2. The Bible is God's manual for guiding us in the change process (2 Peter 1:3).
3. We have been given freedom of choice relative to deciding to change (Joshua 24:15).
4. God commands us to repent or perish (Luke 13:3, 5), therefore we must do what God has commanded (Acts 17:30, 31).
5. The command to "bear fruit" proves that we can change from a non-fruit bearing state to a fruit bearing state (John 15:1-8; Galatians 5:22-26).
6. The fact that we are commanded "to obey" proves that we have the ability to change from disobedience to obedience (Hebrews 5:8, 9).
7. We are commanded to not be "conformed to the world but transformed" (Romans 12:1, 2). Therefore, we can change.

BIBLE EXAMPLES OF PERSONS WHO CHANGED:

The Bible contains examples of persons who changed in both directions: (1) some from good to bad; some (2) from bad to good. I have chosen some New Testament examples for this point:

1. The apostle Peter changed from a lying, denying, and cursing followers of Christ to a man of humility, qualifying to be an elder in the church (Read 1 & 2 Peter).
2. The apostle Paul when from a hater, persecutor, and rejecter of Christ and Christians, to a follower of Christ, a preacher, a writer, and sufferer for Christ (Acts 26:8-12; read his epistles).
3. On the Day of Pentecost, out of a crowd of thousands, three thousand chose to change from following Moses and the Law to following Christ and grace (Read Acts 2).
4. The Gentiles and pagans in Thessalonica changed: *For they themselves declare concerning what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come (1 Thessalonians 1:9, 10).*
5. A Roman military centurion, a leader of an Italian Regiment, a very religious man, changed and became a Christian (Read Acts 10).
6. A government official from Ethiopia was changed while riding in a chariot, reading the scroll of Isaiah. He was taught the Gospel by Philip, an evangelist (Read Acts 8:26-40).

7. A prison guard was changed by choosing to obey the Gospel; having been taught by former prisoners (Read Acts 16:16-34).

A person can change! He can choose to obey the Gospel and change from a lost state to a saved state. After his conversion a person begins a lifelong journey of changing into “The fullness of the measure of Christ (cf. Ephesians 4:11-16). The Epistles are given to us by God in His counseling manual to teach us how to make changes in our lives. In biblical counseling change is presented, if required, as absolutely essential. Jesus gave His life’s blood based on the belief that a person can accept Him as Lord and change his or her life.

No person is too vile or sinful to change. Here is how Paul expressed it to the Christians in Ephesus: *And you he made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience... even when we were dead in trespasses, make us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved) (Ephesians 2:1, 2, 5).*

QUESTIONS THAT HELP BRING ABOUT CHANGE:

All education is related to questions and answers. This is why it is essential in biblical counseling that the proper questions are asked and given proper answers. Here are a few suggestions that may help a counselee gain the most from his or her biblical counseling sessions:

1. What do I really need to change in my life? Write out a full response.
2. Why do I need to make this change? This requires soul searching and honesty.
3. What is my absolute goal in life and how does this change relate to it? Be specific.
4. Why am I reluctant to change? Again, be very honest with yourself.
5. What will continue if I refuse to change? Why is this true?
6. Will my choice to change be pleasing to the Lord? How will it affect others?
7. Who can/will help me make this change? Why do I choose this person?
8. What is the first step I will intentionally take in making this change?
9. What is my clear plan for making this change a reality?
10. How will I handle setbacks and times of discouragement?
11. How will I depend on the Lord and His word to help me?

12. What fruit am I expecting from making this change?

These questions, along with others, can form a foundation, if answered freely and honestly, for making changes in the life of any person—especially those seeking and using biblical counseling as a tool for change.

APPLICATION EXERCISE

1. Write an essay on “Why change is difficult for most people”.
2. How difficult is it for you to make changes in your life?
3. How would you use the Bible in helping a person develop a plan for change?
4. What additional observations do you have?
5. What intentional application will you make of this lesson to your life?