

THE **POSSIBILITY** OF—AND **POWER** BEHIND—TRANSFORMATION

Last week, I spent a good part of the sermon sharing with you—in rather rapid fashion—numerous verses from the New Testament where God tells us we are to have certain **attitudes**... and **do certain** things...and **not do** certain things. **Why** did I do that? Because I really wanted to impress upon **all** of us these **four** truths:

- 1) God **expects us** to change—not **stay the same**—after we are saved.
- 2) If we are honest, we will admit that we are **not yet what God** wants us to be.
- 3) Our **desire to change** needs to grow.
- 4) And we need to **believe** that since God wants us to change, He will **help us** change.

In a nutshell, God's plan for us is to be like Jesus! We see that in Romans 8:29 where it says God wants us to "be conformed to the image of His Son." As to **how** that happens—and what our **role** is in the process of transformation—we will be looking at that in a couple of weeks.

This morning, I want to focus on the **possibility** of transformation. We know in our heads—kinda/sorta—that we can change, but for one reason or another, many believers don't seem very **serious** about **trying** to change. **Why** is that? There are a number of reasons, but here are two of the more common ones:

- 1) They **don't know how!** They want to change—and they've tried to change—but they **don't know how** to change so they haven't changed!
- 2) And—because they don't know how—because they have **tried and failed**—they are **discouraged** to the point that they have kind of given up!

My desire is to do what I can to **rekindle hope** and help us all see that it is never **too late** to change! But—even though that is my desire—in reality, I technically **can't rekindle** hope! Only God can do that! One way God rekindles our hope is by **giving us examples** in the Bible of men who were radically changed after they were born again. God doesn't just provide examples, though—He also tells us what **the power was** behind their transformation. God wants us to know what **enabled them** to change so that we can change too! We will be looking at those two things here this morning.

As already mentioned, we know we can change after we are saved because God gives us examples. One such example is the man we were looking at before the holidays—Saul of Tarsus—also known as Paul. We are going to look at his transformation for two reasons: 1) We know a lot about his life before he was saved—and after. 2) God had him record—probably more times than we realize—the **power** that was behind his change.

First, let's consider... **1. The possibility of change seen in the transformation of Paul**

We won't need to spend a lot of time on this one because we looked at it just a couple of months ago. Please take your Bibles and turn to Galatians 1.

Notice... A. The pre-conversion life of Saul/Paul

I'm using both names for point "A"—Paul's life **before** his conversion; and point "B"—Paul's life **after** his conversion—to stress the fact that Saul's name **did not change to Paul** after he was saved! We know that because **after** he was saved—and serving in the church of Antioch—we read these words in **Acts 13:2** "As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and **Saul** for the work whereunto I have called them." God called him and commissioned him when **his name was Saul**—and this occurred well after his conversion on the road to Damascus!

So why was he sometimes called Saul—and later called Paul—if it had nothing to do with his conversion? Saul was a Jew and consequently had a **Hebrew** name—thus the name Saul. But...he grew up in the **Gentile** city of Tarsus, so he also had a **Latin**—a Roman—name which was "Paulus." And—since God led Saul to be a missionary to the **Gentiles**—he became known by the name "Paul" more than "Saul."

Back to what Saul was like prior to his conversion. Notice what it says in Galatians 1:13. I won't have you turn there, but I want to remind you of some of the things we noted about Saul in the book of Acts.

In Acts 7:58 it says that when Stephen was stoned to death because of his fearless preaching about Christ, “the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man’s feet, whose name was Saul.”

Acts 8:3 “As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison.” To “make havock” means to “damage, destroy and ravage” the church—but it was the **followers of Jesus** he was after—not the buildings where the followers of Jesus met!

Acts 9:1 “And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord...”

No wonder Paul said of himself in vs 13 “how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God and wasted it:”

Now look at vs 15 and the first part of vs 16. God had planned—before Saul was even born—that he would be a preacher to the “heathen”—meaning Gentiles. But Saul needed to be **converted** before he became a preacher, and that conversion took place on the road to Damascus. Jesus **convicted** Saul of his sin...and that his **good works** wouldn’t save him...and that He **needed the forgiveness** found only in Christ. Saul responded by repenting and putting his faith in the resurrected Jesus for the forgiveness of sins.

Now lets’ consider... B. The post-conversion life of Saul/Paul

Was Saul’s life different after he met Christ and was converted? **Acts 9:19-21** “And when he had received meat, he was strengthened. Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus. ²⁰ And straightway **he preached Christ** in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God.” ²¹But all that heard him were amazed, and said; Is not this he that **destroyed them which called on this name** in Jerusalem, and came hither **for that intent**, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests?”

Paul says the same thing about himself in Galatians 1:23-24 “But they heard only, That he which persecuted us in times past now preacheth the faith which once he destroyed. ²⁴ And they glorified God in me.” Why did they **glorify God**—and not Saul? Because **God is the One** who converted and changed Saul! He did not **convert** himself—and he did not **change** himself!

So we’ve seen that change is **possible** because God gives us **proof** in the life of Paul. But what was it that led to this radical change in Paul’s life? Was it just **thinking differently**—having new beliefs—that led to Paul’s new behavior? What was the **power** behind Paul’s transformation? Paul made several pronouncements regarding how to live a victorious Christian life; we’re going to look at just one.

2. The pronouncement regarding a transformed life

I’m guess that some of you—like me—watch WSAW evening news out of Wausau. If you’ve done that for any length of time, you’ve probably seen the commercial from *Wausau Weight Loss*. If my memory serves me right, part of it goes like this: “Do you know the secret? We know the secret!” What they don’t tell you, of course, is how much **money you have** to spend to be given the secret!

Is there a **secret** to living the Christian life? Yes...and no!

Yes; there must be **some kind of secret** because some people **change a lot** after they are saved—and some don’t seem to change **at all**!

But **NO**—it’s not a secret—because it is **written in the Bible** and **available to anyone** who opens the Book and reads it! One of the key passages regarding **living the Christian life** is found in the book of Philippians, chapter 2. Please turn there; notice what it says in verses 12.

Philippians 2:12 “Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, **work out your own salvation** with fear and trembling.”

What does Paul mean by “work out your own salvation?” Is he saying that you have to **do good works** to be saved from the penalty of your sins? **No**; that’s not what he is saying at all! How do we know? Because if that is what he meant, **he would be contradicting** what God Himself had him write in numerous other places! Here are just few: **Romans 3:20** “Therefore **by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified** in His sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.”

Romans 3:28 “Therefore we conclude that a man is **justified by faith without the deeds of the law**.”

Galatians 2:16a “Knowing that a man is **not justified by the works of the law**, but by the faith of Jesus Christ,”

Ephesians 2:8-9 “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: ⁹Not of works, lest any man should boast.”

Titus 3:5a “Not by **works of righteousness which we have done**, but according to His mercy He saved us,”

So when Paul says “work out your own salvation,” he is not contradicting himself and telling us to **try harder** to **do** good and **be** good so we can get to heaven someday!

What he **is telling us to do** is to “work out”—to demonstrate, to bring out in our daily living—things that characterize the life of some who is born again! In other words, if you are a child of God, live like one!

But we can’t! And that’s why the “work out your own salvation” in vs 12 is immediately followed by **vs 13** “For it is **God** which worketh in you **both to will and to do** of His good pleasure.”

So how are we to understand this concept of “**work hard** at doing only what **God** can do?”

--We “get it” that we cannot **save ourselves**—that is God’s doing!

--And we “get it” that we cannot possibly **glorify ourselves** and make our own bodies fit for heaven!

But...how do we tackle this idea of “living for God when you can’t” in such a way that we can **understand** it...and put it **into practice**... and see **actual transformation** take place in our lives?

In my mind, the best way to tackle it is the same way you **eat an elephant**—or get full enough to **feel like Ringo** at Pizza Ranch! **How** is that? **One bite** at a time, right?

So the first “bite” we are going to tackle is...

3. The power behind change is seen in the teachings of Paul

We’ve already seen in Philippians 2:13 that **God is the One** that is in us that gives us both **the desire—and the ability**—to do that which pleases God. But this is not the only place Paul says that. There are a number of others, and I want us to look at a couple of them.

You’re in Philippians, I want you to now go back to where you were a few minutes ago—the book of Galatians. Instead of chapter 1, though, I want you to turn to chapter 2. Notice what it says in verse 8:

Galatians 2:8 “(For He that **wrought effectually** in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was **mighty in me** toward the Gentiles:)

--Who is the “He” that wrought effectually—who worked effectively—in Peter? **God!**

--Who was “mighty” in Paul? The same One that worked in Peter—**God!**

Now vs 20. “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, **but Christ liveth in me**: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me.”

There’s a lot to unpack in this verse and I’m sure we will come back to it another time, but for now I just want you to notice this: who is living **inside** of Paul? **Christ!**

Put your thinking caps on: Did Jesus **leave** heaven—and **come** to earth—and was now living **only in Paul** when he wrote those words? Obviously not because **we are still waiting for Jesus** to leave heaven and come back to earth to get us!

So what did Paul mean when he said, “Christ liveth in me?”

Turn now toward the front of your Bibles to Romans 8. I could put these verses on your outline, but I really want you to see them for yourselves in your own Bibles.

To get a little bit of the context, let’s start at **verse 8**: “So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God. ⁹ But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the **Spirit of God** dwell in you. Now if any man have not the **Spirit of Christ**, he is none of His.”

--Who—according to verse 9—dwells in believers? The Spirit of **God**—and the Spirit of **Christ!** Is Paul referring to **two different** Spirits? No; the Spirit **of God** and the Spirit **of Christ** are being used interchangeably—and both are a reference to the **Holy Spirit!**

That “interchangeableness” is seen again in verse 10. “And if **Christ be in you**, the body is dead because of sin; but the **Spirit is life** because of righteousness.”

--**Christ** is in us because the **Holy Spirit** is in us—and the Holy Spirit produces Christ’s spirit in us.

¹¹ But if the **Spirit of Him** that raised up Jesus from the dead **dwelt in you**, He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by His Spirit that **dwelleth in you**.”

--The certainty—the guarantee—that true believers will someday be raised up—and have a glorified body like the body of Jesus—is based on the fact that we already have—in us—the same Spirit that raised up Jesus!

And since the Holy Spirit is **powerful enough** to raise Jesus from the dead—He is able to raise us from the dead! And if He is able to raise us **from the dead**, He is certainly able to **change us and make** us more like Christ!

Now vs 12. “Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh.”

What is Paul saying? We are not **debtors**—we are not under obligation—to live selfish, sinful, flesh-driven lives because we have the power of God dwelling inside of us!

So the **power** of change is really the **person** of change and the **person** of change is God Himself! You **cannot change** you—but **God can** change you—because there is **nothing too hard** for Him!

Notice **the quote** I have for you from Dr. Rick Taylor’s book, *The Anatomy of a Disciple*: “He [God] promised to **make you a different person**, not just make you appear as a different person on the outside” (Page 27).

Dr. Taylor continues: “The first thing you have to understand and believe if you are going to experience authentic life change, and be a more complete image bearer of God in this world, is that all genuine, authentic life change **begins with God**. Not you. **He is the change agent**. *Not you....* As long as you think and live as if it’s **up to you**, you will be hopelessly stuck in the whirlpool of do good, try hard and fail. Until you let go of the subtle idea that **it’s all up to you**, you are still trying to be your own functional savior and will never truly become like Christ” (Page 27).

I won’t have you turn back to Galatians again, but notice the verses from Galatians 3 that I have on your outline. **Galatians 3:2** “This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?” Paul is asking them, ‘How is it that the Holy Spirit came to indwell you? Did you receive Him by doing—or by putting your faith in Christ?’ The answer is obvious—by trusting in Christ!

Now vs 3. “Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?” ‘Since you began your spiritual life by the work of the Holy Spirit, how do you think you can perfect yourself—complete yourself and make yourself mature and Christ-like—by your own self-efforts?’

The answer? You can’t—and you are being foolish to try!

The Christian life is not about us becoming more self-controlled and self-disciplined—it is about **God changing us**. It is about **God doing in us** what we cannot do! We’ll look at **our responsibility** in the process down the road, but for now I just want us to be convinced that God is **in us**...and God can **change us**—but He **won’t change us** if we are counting on us! He does not share His glory!

Here’s an illustration that might help you understand a little better what it means to have the availability of the **power of the Holy Spirit** within us. A few months ago, several of us here from church got together to cut wood. My chainsaw wasn’t working right. It would start—and run for a few seconds—then quit. I asked Don about it and his first words were, ‘Did you check the air filter?’ I’m sure the puzzled look on my face was a dead giveaway that I obviously hadn’t! So I had all this power available, but wasn’t “tapping into it” because the air filter was full of junk!

In a similar way, we have the power of God the Holy Spirit inside of us—wanting to change us—but we hinder Him from working. He wants to change us—but we are stopping Him. We'll talk more about our role in the future, but I want to close by having us turn to Romans 15:13. "Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, **through the power** of the Holy Ghost."

What about you? Are you full of joy and peace—and abounding in hope? God wants to do that in you through His power, not yours!

What would God have us do this morning?

1. If you're not saved—if you're not born again—God wants you to come to Him for forgiveness of sins. He wants you to come to Him **in repentance**—knowing you are sinful and deserving judgment. But He also wants you to come to Him **in faith**—believing that what Jesus did for you on the cross was the satisfactory payment for the penalty you deserve.

2. If you are saved, God wants you to **depend on Him** to change you—not on yourself! And I believe God wants us to be humbled by **our lack of faith in His power**—but at the same time hopeful that He will indeed change us!