

You Can Change!



Discovering God's Word
Bible Study Series

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Introduction

A. "I have sinned!" This is the saddest, yet most important realization any of us can come to (Romans 3:23).

B. This realization can leave us feeling hopeless because we are faced with the consequences of our actions. And, we may even question whether change is possible.

C. Take a few moments to consider some areas in which you need to make changes by getting rid of sin that is in your life.

1. Perhaps in your relationships (with your spouse, children, parents, etc.). Perhaps with personal struggles and habits (sexual sin, pornography, alcohol, tobacco, gambling, anger, coveting, laziness, etc.). Perhaps in your mindset (to be more forgiving, to better deal with worry and fear, etc.). Perhaps not to allow things of this life to distract you from serving God (to study your Bible, pray, faithfully attend the assemblies of the local church, work for the Lord, etc.).

2. Whatever sin is in your life today, there is good news! God loved the world so much that He sent Jesus to die so you can be saved from your sins (John 3:16; Romans 1:16)!

D. Purpose: To learn about your opportunity to change through Jesus, be encouraged to change through Biblical examples, be warned about things that may prevent you from changing, and know how to change.

1. Christ Provides You The Opportunity To Change

A. An opportunity to hope

1. A life without hope is miserable! Too many people believe that hope is out of reach and sadly conclude their lives are not worth living.

2. Ephesians 2:11-13 describes Gentiles as having been separated from God and without hope. However, they can now be brought near and have access to God! Like them, anyone who is in sin is separated from hope. Yet, through Jesus, we can all have hope!

- The opportunity to hope will inspire people. If you have felt like your life is hopeless, listen to the gospel's message! It is a message of hope – a message that says you can change your life and be saved from your sins through Jesus!

B. An opportunity to be forgiven

1. Forgiveness of past sins can only be found in Jesus Christ (Acts 13:38; Ephesians 1:7). There is simply no forgiveness found through anyone or anything besides Him (Acts 4:12)!

2. When God forgives your sins, they are completely removed – without a trace remaining (Acts 3:19). The idea comes from a Greek word that referred to creditors recording the debts of their debtors on wax-covered tablets. Then, when the debt had been paid, the creditor would smooth the wax and completely remove any trace of the debt.

- This is how God forgives sin through Jesus! He does not remember your sins against you anymore, removing every trace of the sin from your record (Matthew 18:23-27; Hebrews 10:17). So, with God, you do not have to continuously live with your past sins still clinging to you! While there may be physical consequences that remain from your sin (i.e. disease, jail time, hurt relationships, injured reputation, broken trust, etc.), you can have a fresh start in your relationship with God!

C. An opportunity to start new

1. When the sinful ways of the old person have been forgiven, a way for the new person is created. In Christ, you can be a new creation and be born again (2 Corinthians 5:17; John 3:3-5). This new life in Christ is different from the old ways of sin (Romans 6:3-4).

2. As a new creation, you must live in holiness – in a way that pleases God (Ephesians 4:22-24).

- Colossians 3:1-17 also describes this transformation in greater detail – including things that Christians must get out of their lives and things that must be included in their lives!

D. An opportunity to overcome

1. In your past, you have been overcome by temptations concerning worldly things (1 John 2:15-17).

2. While you may have often struggled to overcome these temptations, Jesus has now provided you an opportunity to overcome them all! Having been forgiven of your past sins and given a new start, you can now look at these old, familiar struggles in a new light.

- You should begin looking at your obstacles through the word of God. This is how Jesus overcame the temptations He faced (Matthew 4:1-11)!

2. Examples Of Change

A. Simon

1. Simon had practiced sorcery in Samaria for a long time, gaining notoriety among the people as being the “Great Power of God” (Acts 8:9-11). So, he likely would have gained his livelihood through his ability to deceive people and had become a master in the art of manipulating other people.

2. Yet, when Philip came to Samaria, performing true miracles and preaching the good news about the kingdom of God, many people were converted to Christ – including Simon (Acts 8:12-13).

- Simon, apparently, recognized that what he had been doing was fake and that the miracles being performed were real! Rather than fighting against the major change that accepting this truth would require of him, he responded in obedience!

3. Accepting the gospel would have (presumably) come at great personal and financial cost – perhaps including the loss of his job, being exposed as a fraud and manipulator, etc. Yet, he did not ignore the truth he had seen and heard!

- We should note that Simon still struggled after his baptism. Acts 8:14-25 tells how Simon sinned after being baptized. Still, he was given the opportunity to repent of that wickedness, pray to God, and receive forgiveness (Acts 8:22).

B. Saul

1. Saul was a fierce enemy of Christ and Christians. In fact, he worked to ravage the church, putting Christians into prison and having them put to death (Acts 8:1-3; Acts 22:3-5; Acts 26:9-11). He was a “rising

star” in Pharisaic Judaism, who believed he was doing the right thing by persecuting Christians and trying to destroy Jesus’s church.

2. Yet, when he met Jesus on the road to Damascus, he became convinced Jesus is the Son of God he had persecuted. Then, he repented of his sin and was baptized for the forgiveness of his sins (Acts 9:3-19; Acts 22:16)!

- When he learned the truth, he was willing to do whatever it took to change! Everything about his earthly standing was considered non-important so he could follow Jesus. And, he did not hesitate to be obedient to God!

3. Here was a man who considered himself as being the worst sinner (1 Timothy 1:12-17). Yet, he found forgiveness through God’s rich mercy!

- Paul also teaches that if God was patient and merciful with him, God can be patient and merciful with anyone! Then, like Paul, God can use you in His service to accomplish amazing things to His glory!

C. The Corinthians

1. The city of Corinth was an extremely wicked and immoral city. In fact, it was a city that had a reputation for its immorality. The Greek phrase, “korinthiazesthai” meant, “to live as a Corinthian.” Particularly, Corinth was a place known for its idolatry and sexual immorality.

2. When the gospel came to the city of Corinth, many people responded in obedience (Acts 18:8). God encouraged Paul not to be afraid and to speak the gospel there because God said He had many people in that city (Acts 18:9-11).

- It is encouraging that many people who had only ever known immorality could be interested by the gospel!

3. 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 gives some insight into both the wickedness of the Corinthians and the change they made through Jesus. Although they were involved in the wicked things that are listed in this text, they had their sins forgiven and were no longer those things. Rather, they were now temples of God (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)!

- It does not matter what wicked things you have been involved in previously, you can find the same forgiveness they found through Jesus Christ!

3. Some Refuse Their Opportunity To Change

A. Denial

1. Some deny they have a problem. Yet, the first step to real change is to admit there is a problem. If people do not, they will not look for a way to change anything.

2. Some deny the solution. Sometimes people recognize there is a problem but reject God's solution. Maybe they think they are too far gone for God's solution to work. Or, perhaps, they do not like what God says is necessary to correct the problem (Matthew 19:21-22).

B. Excuses

1. Excuses are made to justify our conduct. Many people blame other things or people for their actions rather than taking personal responsibility for their own choices and for fixing the problems!

2. Excusing your conduct by casting blame on someone or something else may make you feel better for a while, but it will prevent you from experiencing real change (Genesis 3:11-13)!

C. Pride

1. People don't like to be wrong or admit they have done wrong. Admission of wrong is often seen as a shameful thing rather than a courageous thing. Because people often don't want others to see that they have done wrong, they try to maintain a false image.

2. If you allow pride to fill your heart, you will try to justify your actions rather than make the necessary changes (2 Kings 5:10-14)!

D. Self-pity

1. "Woe is me." "Look what I'm going through." "Look how hard it is to overcome my struggles." While some of these sentiments may be true, they can also be dangerous because they lead to self-pity and self-justifying actions.

2. If you allow self-pity to take control, you will always have an easy and convenient excuse to justify your lack of change (Job 19:21; Job 42:1-6)!

E. False religion

1. Some have tried to find change through false religion. However, there are many people who are religious and who even call themselves “Christians” who have never actually obeyed God so as to be forgiven.

2. If you are content with a form of religion rather than seeking God according to His word of truth in the Bible, you will be deceived about the change you think you have experienced and the hope you think you have (Matthew 7:21-23)!

4. Things Involved In Change

A. A conviction that what you have done is wrong

1. The first step to change is to recognize your need for change. Humility is required for this to happen. The word of God works to produce this conviction (Hebrews 4:12).

2. When you discover that your life does not measure up to God’s standards, you should experience godly grief (2 Corinthians 7:10), knowing that you have separated yourself from God and are headed for eternal punishment in Hell because of your sin!

B. A recognition that you cannot correct the situation by yourself

1. True change will never come by yourself. Although you may make (and perhaps have made) such attempts, they will all fall short of what true change can bring.

2. True change can only come through God by receiving His forgiveness, discovering His will for your life, and living according to His purpose. Eternal spiritual death is what we deserve for sinning against God (Romans 6:23). Salvation can only be found through true faith in Jesus, as we cannot save ourselves (Ephesians 2:8-9)!

C. Repentance

1. Repentance is essential for salvation (Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38; Acts 17:30). Repentance is a change of mind that produces a changed life.

2. When you repent, you will hate the past sins you have committed and determine to live entirely for the Lord. Repentance is preceded by godly grief and is followed by living a changed life (2 Corinthians 7:10; Acts 26:20).

D. Obedience

1. True faith in God requires obedience (Matthew 7:21-23). To become a Christian and receive God's forgiveness, you must: Hear God's word (Romans 10:17), believe in Jesus (John 8:24), repent of your sins (Acts 17:30), confess Jesus Christ (Romans 10:9-10), and be baptized (immersed) in water for the forgiveness of your sins (Acts 2:38).

2. If you have once taken these steps but returned to sin, you must: repent of your sins (Acts 8:22), confess your sins to God (1 John 1:9), and pray for forgiveness (Acts 8:22).

E. Diligence

1. Living for the Lord will not always be easy. Satan will try to lure you away from God through your fleshly desires. But, you must persevere and resist him (1 Corinthians 10:13; 1 Peter 5:8-9).

2. You must be diligent in putting your old sinful ways to death (Colossians 3:5-9). You must not just temporarily pause your sinful ways. Rather, you must kill the desire to live for yourself and start living for God (Galatians 2:20; Galatians 5:24; Ephesians 4:22-24)!

Conclusion

A. You can change! Take some time to reflect on the changes you must make in your life. Then, do whatever is necessary to make those changes!

B. However, recognize that your opportunity to change is limited. Your life could end at any time or Jesus could return at any moment. So, do not delay! Make the necessary changes in your life today – while you have the opportunity (2 Corinthians 6:2)!

Study Questions

Do you need to change? What are some areas you need to change in?

1. Christ Provides You The Opportunity To Change

Why is hope important? How is hope available through Jesus?

Where is forgiveness found? What happens when God forgives?

Why do you have the opportunity to start new? What should this new life look like?

How have you been overcome in this past? How can you now overcome the same through Jesus?

2. Examples Of Change

What can you learn about change from the example of Simon?

What can you learn about change from the example of Saul?

What can you learn about change from the Corinthians?

3. Some Refuse Their Opportunity To Change

Why is denial harmful to your ability to change?

Why are excuses harmful to your ability to change?

Why is pride harmful to your ability to change?

Why is self-pity harmful to your ability to change?

Why is false religion harmful to your ability to change?

4. Things Involved In Change

Why is it essential to be convicted that you have done wrong?

Why is it essential to recognize that you cannot correct the situation by yourself?

Why is it essential to repent?

Why is it essential to be obedient?

Why is it essential to be diligent?

