

How Do We Change People?

Intro Our sermon today is in the form of a question . . . How do we change people?

What do you think about that? Should we try to change people?

- 1) In regard to matters of individual choice, where there is no sin (matters of liberty) – we have no cause to try to change people.
- 2) In matters of opinion, where there is no issue of salvation – we should keep ourselves out of the lives of others.
- 3) But when souls are at stake, God has assigned His people the duty of using appropriate efforts to bring people to use the Word of God to change their lives.
- 4) Here are four passages giving us this instruction – about the care we should have toward the salvation of others.
 - a. 1 Cor. 10:24 – “Let no one seek his own, but each one the other’s well-being.”
 1. You should seek my well-being.
 2. This is not about any intrusion into my life, or any effort to dictate or control.
 3. This is not about monitoring my life and work while ignoring your own.
 4. This is simply the care and love we should have toward each other.
 - b. Eph. 4:15 – “. . . speaking the truth in love . . .”
 1. God’s requirement here involves two things – and only when these two things are combined, have we obeyed God.
 2. Speaking the truth in love.
 3. Not with anger, not with any self-righteousness, not to display your irritation, not just to lodge a complaint.
 4. But speaking the truth in love.

- c. Paul illustrates the care we should have that others might be saved in Rom. 10:1, where he said, “. . . my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved . . .”
 - d. And specifically toward the erring brethren – there is this statement in Jas. 5:19-20 – “Brethren, if anyone around you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way, will save a soul from death and cover over a multitude of sins.”
- 5) When souls are at stake – God has assigned His people the duty of using appropriate efforts to bring people to use the Word of God to change their lives.
 - 6) I want to emphasize – this study concerns souls at stake; evidence of sin or disobedience, and the faithful use of methods God has given.
 - 7) My purpose now is to speak to us about appropriate efforts; the question is:

I. How Do We Change People?

Might there be some methods which are carnal and ill-advised? Here are some methods virtually guaranteed to get no good results! Likewise, these methods do not have God’s approval.

A. Using subtle intimidation and manipulation.

1. In politics, in business, in interpersonal relationships, in some marriages – there are efforts to change people through intimidation and manipulation.
2. Books are written on this subject; some people boast about their skill in their efforts to change people through sheer intimidation and manipulation.
3. Threatening . . . maneuvering people into doing something they resist . . . using people and events and pressure, to get people to do as you desire.
4. Do you know who has been doing this for the longest time?
The devil!
 - a. He will lie.

- b. He will promise anything you want.
 - c. He will use people, events and pressure to try and manipulate us and move us to destroy ourselves through sin.
 - 5. II Cor. 11:3 – the devil deceived Eve by his craftiness.
 - 6. It does not become us to use the tactics of the devil to change people for the kingdom of God. Intimidation and manipulation are not in our tool bag.
- B. A Critical, Complaining Spirit
- 1. Do you think you can gripe someone into faithfully serving the Lord?
 - 2. I'm not asking – do people irritate us; do people disappoint us; do people need our attention – *I understand all of that.*
 - a. People irritate us.
 - b. People disappoint us.
 - c. There are people, there are brethren who need our attention.
 - d. All of that is granted.
 - e. And I know – we are tempted to complain and gripe.
 - 3. But I raise the question – What good results from griping?
 - 4. When we become a complainer, we help nobody. We slowly destroy ourselves, we do not please the Lord, and we actually hurt and discourage those we complain about!
 - 5. The word “complain,” or a form of it, is found 20 times in the Bible (NKJ).
 - a. In Micah 6:2 – the context is, the Lord’s complaint against His people – the Lord took appropriate action to resolve His issue with His people.

- b. In Acts 6:1 – the context is, a complaint that widows were being neglected – the apostles acted to resolve the issue by the appointment of deacons.
 - c. In Col. 3:13 – the context is, a brother with a complaint against another – Paul teaches the complaint is to be resolved by patience and forgiveness.
 - 6. In every other instance of the word – there is no good outcome. Gossip and backbiting is often associated with “gripping.”
 - 7. God never recommends anywhere in His Word that we gripe and complain to change people.
 - 8. Let us give up that method.
 - 9. Remember – when you throw mud at someone, you’re the one who is losing ground.
- C. We cannot effectively change people by means of conspiracy.
- 1. Sometimes brethren will say something like, “Let’s get together and talk about how we can “help” someone.”
 - 2. Even if we have truly noble intentions, this enterprise is dangerous and must be very cautiously pursued.
 - 3. Often, we just want to talk about people, complain about them, gossip and work out some human plan to bring them in line, so we can claim victory.
 - 4. Again it must be said, God does not recommend conversion by conspiracy.
 - 5. We should give up that carnal method.
- D. We cannot change people by force.
- 1. “For the weapons of warfare are not carnal,” Paul said in II Cor. 10:4.
 - 2. How many people have been converted to believe the truth about abortion by the bombing of a clinic?
 - 3. How many were converted to the religious agenda of the terrorist when they carried out their attack on 9-11?

4. We cannot change people by force - it only creates “terror.”
 5. The call of the gospel is, “whosoever will.”
 6. The desire of the individual is essential to salvation, so Jesus said, “. . . whoever desires to come after Me . . .” in Mark 8:34.
- E. If a change is necessary, let’s be certain our methods are in keeping with God’s will.
1. We cannot change people by intimidation and manipulation.
 2. We cannot change people by complaining and griping.
 3. We cannot effectively change or save people by human methods of conspiracy.
 4. We cannot change people by force.

II. Let’s think about how we can change people with appropriate methods. How do we change people? By letting God’s Word guide us in our approach!

Sinners are changed by the Word of God! Our responsibility is to faithful delivery of God’s Word. Not just any method will get it done.

- A. When we see a need to reach someone who is lost or drifting, our work should be the Presentation of Divine Truth.
1. When we observe someone lost in sin, some brother who is erring – don’t get mad, get busy. Set about the work of faithfully presenting divine truth.
 2. Read with them, study with them, pray with them.
 - a. Yelling at them will not serve your purpose.
 - b. Gossip and griping are methods never recommended by God.
 3. People cannot be changed or converted without the Word of God. So the Word of God should be all we use!
 4. Look what happens with the presentation of God’s truth.

Acts 18:24-28 (READ)

- a. What did this couple do, in response to this man who needed to be instructed?
 - b. They didn't just get mad, gripe, and gossip.
 - c. They didn't use intimidation, force or conspiracy. They didn't just talk about Apollos to others.
 - d. They took him aside, and explained to him the way of God more accurately. Probably with sincerity, courtesy, and respect.
5. When we observe someone lost in sin, don't get mad, get busy. Set about the work of faithfully presenting the divine truth.

B. We can change people who are willing to be changed by the Consistent Application of Good Influence.

1. Do you want to make a difference in the lives of those who are lost . . . or those who are weak and need attention?
2. Along with the presentation of divine truth, be certain that your life and your behavior are in harmony with your message.
3. Phil. 2:14-15 – “Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain.”
4. If you really care about the lost and unfaithful, be certain you are living just as described in this passage in Phil. 2:14-15.
 - a. No complaining or disputing.
 - b. Be sure you are blameless, harmless, that your spirit of humility and love is apparent to all.
 - c. We must strive to be Children of God without fault.

- d. Shine as lights in the world.
 - e. Holding fast the word of life.
5. If you really want to make a difference toward those who are not obedient to God, be certain there is from your life – the consistent application of good influence.
 6. You must illustrate what you teach.
- C. Third – we can use God’s Methods of Admonition and Discipline.
1. God has given us the tools for the job.
 2. If the job is
 - Changing someone . . .
 - Converting someone . . .
 - Encouraging someone . . .
 3. Let God tell you how to act/proceed.
 4. The NT is loaded with instruction about this Christian duty.
 5. Two examples:
 - a. I Thes. 5:14 – “Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all.”
 - b. Nothing here about griping, forcing, conspiring or manipulating.
 - c. If someone is unruly – warn them.
 - d. Fainthearted – comfort them.
 - e. Weak – uphold them.
 - f. And when we undertake these duties, what is required of us – “Be patient with all” or else we reflect a poor spirit.
 6. Gal. 6:1 – “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.”

- a. If you want to undertake this duty specified in Gal. 6:1, first you must be certain you are qualified.
- b. To be qualified to do this work, you must be spiritual.
- c. You must be willing to do this work “in a spirit of gentleness.”
 1. Can you ignore this?
 2. “In a spirit of gentleness.”
 3. If you ignore this – you are guilty before God and you need to be admonished.
- d. And you must consider yourself, “lest you also be tempted.”

III. But let me add – even when these appropriate methods are applied, the desired effect may not result because of the factor of individual human will.

- A. Jesus used perfect approaches, unflawed methods, perfect attitude, effective delivery of the truth, with the best possible influence – and many who heard Him remained lost in sin.
- B. The apostle Paul preached his heart out. He said to the Ephesians, “I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.”
 1. Paul wrote many of the books of the NT.
 2. He sacrificed. He freely expressed his love and mercy toward the lost – taught the truth perfectly.
 3. Yet many who heard the preaching of Paul and knew his life rejected the gospel.
- C. There is this factor – the exercise of the human will.
 1. If there is no good and honest heart
 2. If the will to obey God is absent – the person will not change.

3. Your methods may be perfect, and your message exactly as written in the Word.
4. Jesus said to His enemies, “You do not have His word abiding in you, because whom He sent, Him you do not believe.” Jn. 5:38

D. My job is to make sure my attitude is sincere, my methods are in keeping with God’s will, my approach is governed by divine wisdom.

E. But even when I get all that right, I need to know that there might be a rejection of the gospel OR a rate of change which is slower than we expected.

- Concl
- 1) How do we change people?
 - 2) If you really care for lost souls, if you really love and want to save your erring brother – how do you change people?
 - A. Not by intimidation.
 - B. Not by griping.
 - C. Not by conspiracy.
 - D. Not by force.
 - 3) Eph. 4:15 needs our attention – “speak the truth in love.”
 - A. Not only must we be certain the message is the truth –
 - B. We are obligated to be certain the attitude and motive is love.
 - 4) Perhaps someone in the audience is ready now to make a change away from sin and error, into Christ, near God – ready for heaven. We give you that opportunity, while we stand and sing.