

Community Church of Issaquah
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Were We Changed for Good?
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There are times when I read verses from the Scriptures, and they simply boggle my little brain. When our Adult Forum was studying Paul's first letter to the churches in Corinth, the passage that we had read for us this morning struck me as something I was not sure we as humans could really understand – at least I might never get the deeper meaning. This portion of Paul's epistle primarily addresses his passion about the second coming of Christ. For him and his understanding, that would be happening very soon, so they had better be ready.

But there is more to this passage than Paul's description of what would happen for believers when Jesus reappears to call us home. He divides the world into these two groups, the mortals and the immortals. When the end of time comes, we will all be swallowed up in victory and raised to eternity. Sounds simple, doesn't it? But if we back up some, we'd have a clearer understanding of how Paul has divided the world into these two categories. Let me try to explain how I interpret this and let me offer a personal view about what this means for you and me.

You and I are born as mortals, meaning we are born as human beings. Each of us is given a mind, a body, and a spirit that identifies who we are and what that means to each of us. From birth, I began a journey that has led me

these 80 years to this very place. My transition from simply being a mortal human being to becoming immortal began when as a teenager I heard the message of Jesus Christ, repented, accepted him as my personal savior, and that changed my life forever.

It is our personal faith and our own acceptance of Christ that changes our place in the spiritual world. If I had remained in a life where I refused to accept Christ, I would still be in that mortal world that Paul says is ruled by the power of sin. But when I took Christ as Savior, confessed the sins I had committed, and sought the assurance of eternal life with Christ in Heaven, I changed. Life changed. Is that the end of change for me as a Christian? Absolutely not. Paul told the Corinthians that when the end time comes and the trumpet sounds, the dead will be raised, and we will be changed. What about the space between those two changes, though? What has changed in my own life from the time I was 14 as a new Christian and today at 80? What about you? What has changed in your life from the day of your acceptance of Christ to today? Let me share three ways we do change in our faith.

First, we are changed as we commit ourselves to knowing Christ better and more personally. Each experience we encounter in our spiritual journey brings about changes that build our lives into stronger believers. If you're wondering what changes that might mean for you, think about you:

- Have you learned more about the Word of God from reading and studying the Bible? Change

- Do you continue to seek forgiveness and to cleanse your spirit from sin so that you grown closer to God? Confession, forgiveness, renewal. Can we call that change?
- Have you grown in your own faith by allowing yourself to be shepherded by a minister? Change
- Have you grown in your faith by being a part of a church or fellowship? Change
- Have you changed in your love and care for others as you answer the call to be a worker of faith? Change

In truth, we are nowhere near what we used to be like as we began our discipleship with our Lord, Jesus Christ. Change has flooded our lives even if we haven't always thought of it that way.

Second, we have changed in our acceptance of the teachings of Jesus Christ and our desire to follow those commandments. As we do, we change for the better.

Think about these changes:

- Do you strive to practice loving God with all your heart and mind and soul and then to love others in His name?
- Do you want change to come to you as you strive to build a world of peace, beginning with you and your family and then to the world?
- Do you seek to find ways to help the poor, the hungry, the thirsty, the tired, the weak, the outcast? Each time you move into one of those places where people stand in need, you change.
- Do you try to find ways to offer your care and support to those people God has placed in your life, whether family, friends, or stranger? When we do, we change.

When I went to East Africa to serve as a missionary journeyman, I took with me such a narrow view of the world and its needs. I had come from a white man's world of what my mother once called it, "the have's, the have not's, and the charge-it's." Living in a new world of enormous need and hope was eye opening for me. Let me repeat this advice from today's Bible verses that Paul gives us to follow as we seek to change to immortality.

"Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor is the Lord is not in vain."

And lastly, we change by those who are an integral part of our lives, and at the same time, we help them to change. I am not a movie going person. It just isn't my thing to sit in a theater with many others watching a giant screen while those behind me chomping popcorn or slurping sodas which I try to concentrate on the movie and hope I can make it through the entire movie before I have to run to the restroom. But I was tempted this year when I heard about a movie called "Wicked." I saw so many comments from friends and others who raved about it as being amazing. To be honest, I'm not even sure what it was or is about, but there is a song in the movie or play that truly speaks to me about how others have changed my life and how I hope I might have helped change the life of someone else. The title of the song is "For Good." Let me share some of the words and hope this speaks to you.

*I've heard it said
That people come into our lives for a reason
Bringing something we must learn
And we are led
To those who help us most to grow
If we let them
And we help them in return
Well, I don't know if I believe that's true
But I know I'm who I am today
Because I knew you...
Who can say if I've been changed for the better?
But because I knew you
I have been changed for good*

*It well may be
That we will never meet again
In this lifetime
So let me say before we part
So much of me
Is made of what I learned from you
You'll be with me
Like a handprint on my heart
And now whatever way our stories end
I know you have re-written mine
By being my friend...
Who can say if I've been changed for the better?
I do believe I have been
Changed for the better
Because I knew you...
I have been changed for good...*

It seems clear to me that indeed we have changed. Like Paul describes, we are changed from unrighteous to righteous when we intentionally and personally make the choice to accept Jesus Christ as our Savior. With Christ as our Redeemer, we enter into a right relationship with God that hopefully endures for our lifetime. We change from mortal to immortal as we await our being called to dwell with God. It's when we enter into the righteous world of all who are in the right relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ that our actions change as well. We no longer tend to focus inwardly but address our attention to those around us who are in need of our care, support, and faith.

For me, the most important and meaningful change that has become my focus in life is the change I am able to give to others who come into my life. When my time on earth is done and I pass on to life eternal, I pray that I can honestly say that I hope my life helped someone to change for the better. Let me close by repeating that verse I shared earlier that brings so much hope and grace to me. Hear these words:

“Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor is the Lord is not in vain.”