January 3, 2016

“How We Can Change”

1 John 5:21

**FCF**: Struggling with making changes

**PROPOSITION**: (anchor) Because our need runs deep,

(magnet) we need to look to the Lord for substantive change.

**SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:**

A new year is a great time to start fresh. There’s something about the change of the calendar that awakens in us new resolve and inspires resolutions. No doubt no few of us have a few in mind. Perhaps you have aspirations for your diet, exercise, finances, Bible study, prayer.

But for all our aspirations, we also have our frustrations. We remember past attempts, the difficulties and failures. Which can create a shadow of disillusionment. Resolutions are hard.

What does the Bible have to say about this – both the struggle and the way of success?

**SCRIPTURE READING**: 1 John 5:13-21

**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION**

**SERMON INTRODUCTION:**

From the start, let me say that there’s nothing wrong with New Year’s resolutions. They can be good. We are made to strive, to have goals. And there can be a humility reflected in realizing you haven’t arrived and need to make changes in your life. So resolutions can be good.

That said, resolutions can go bad. For all that humility reflected in a desire to change, there can be much pride, especially if we think it will be by our resolve we meet our resolutions. Compounding that, too often we make them too much about ourselves and what’s good for us.

So they can be good. But they can go bad. Why do they go bad? The Scriptures help us see we often have a superficial understanding of our behavior – of why we do the things we do. And with that superficial understanding, we stick band aids on a chest wound. We put antiseptic on a cancer. We snip deep rooted weeds with scissors. And so real change never comes.

What we need to grapple with is this. Our need runs deep. And because our need runs deep, we need to look to the Lord for real change. Along those lines, it will do us well to carefully consider these three things. First, we need to look at the problem of the heart. Second, we need to look at the reality of idols. And, third, we need to look at the path for change.

1. **THE PROBLEM OF THE HEART**

So, first, let’s look at the problem of the heart (READ Matthew 15:16-20a).

1. *Understanding the Source*

This helps us to get at the problem of the heart, understanding the source of the problem.

1. Definition of “heart”

But let’s talk definitions. What is the “heart”? Jesus is not referring to that beating muscle in your chest. The heart is the deep seat of your affections, what rules your longings and desires.

1. Jesus’ teaching

And Jesus is saying that everything we think, say, and do is an overflow of that, of our hearts. Our behavior is not disconnected from our hearts. It flows out of hearts, reflecting what’s there.

1. *Addressing the Source*

Understanding then the source of the problem gets us towards addressing the problem.

1. Deeper than we think

Starting with seeing that this is not a surface issue. The problem is much deeper than we think.

1. Beyond our reach

And, coupled with that, it is beyond our reach. A good list and a strong will are not enough.

Our behavior is tied to our hearts. So for behavior to change, our hearts must be changed.

*Application:*

All of which reminds us of just how deep our need really is. Which speaks to a bit of what I’ll call post-holiday irony. What I meant by that is this. On December 25th, we gladly say, “A Savior has come!” And then, on January 1st, we follow that with, “We must save ourselves!”

My friends, our need runs deep. And so we must look to the Lord for substantive change.

1. **THE REALITY OF IDOLS**

Which takes us to the second point, the reality of idols (READ 1 John 5:21).

1. *Explanation of the Concept*

This text can be so very helpful in explaining the concept of idolatry.

1. Definition of “idolatry”

Again, let’s start with a definition. What is “idolatry”? It is to worship and serve, depend on and trust in, anything or anyone ahead of God. It is to allow your heart to be led by any god but God.

1. Key for understanding

Which brings us to 1 John 5:21. Reading this text, you have to ask, “*Why does John end with this?*” He is either just slapping this on the end. Or somehow this is summing up all he has said thus far. And that’s it. The whole text, the whole letter, the whole Bible speaks to this point!

1. *Expansion of the Concept*

(READ 1 John 5:21) Let me move from explaining the concept to then expanding it.

1. Beyond what we might think

Idolatry is far beyond what we might think. Idols are not limited to physical objects worshipped by primitive peoples. Nor is it limited to just bad things like vengeance, lust, or greed.

1. Including far more

No, idolatry includes far more than that. You see, we can make an idol of anything, even good things. Put another way, we’ve fallen into idolatry when we want a good thing too much.

And so the only way for real change to come is for our idols to be dismantled.

*Application:*

How does this play itself out with regard to our resolutions? Good question! Let’s say you want to lose some weight. So you decide to eat less or eat differently. You start to exercise. Which is all fine. But why are we overeating in the first place? It’s often because of loneliness, a low view of ourselves, or some other heart issue tied to an idol. And that has to be addressed.

Or let’s say a workaholic dad resolves to become a family man, to spend more time at home. Which is all fine. But why was he so driven to begin with? Why has work been first thus far? It might be reputation, approval, finances, or some other idol. Which has to be addressed.

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1. **THE PATH FOR CHANGE**

Which brings me to this. How then do we change? How do we dismantle these idols?

1. *Look at the Symptoms*

Idolatry is like a disease. And with any disease, it has its particular symptoms.

1. Interrogate yourself

To look at the symptoms, we need to begin to interrogate ourselves, to ask hard questions. Ken Sande, in The Peacemaker, has a list of “X-ray questions” well worth our using (READ quote):

* What am I preoccupied with? What is the first thing on my mind in the morning and the last thing on my mind at night?
* How would I complete this statement: “If only \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, then I would be happy, fulfilled, and secure”?
* What do I want to preserve or avoid?
* Where do I put my trust?
* What do I fear?
* When a certain desire is not met, do I feel frustration, anxiety, resentment, bitterness, anger, or depression?
* Is there something I desire so much that I am willing to disappoint or hurt others in order to have it?”
1. Connect the dots

So we ask ourselves those questions. And we connect the dots. We let the answers settle in. And then we own where our trust, faith, joy, hope, and heart has been. We own it and confess it.

1. *Look to the Savior*

We look at the symptoms. And, not stopping there, then we look to the Savior.

1. See Him as sufficient

We look to Him as He has revealed Himself to us by His Spirit in His Word. And we see Him as sufficient. We see Him as all that we’ve been looking for in our idols. All the comfort, the security, the approval, the power – and more. We see and bow before Him as sufficient.

1. Seek out His help

And seek out His help – moment by moment, day by day. Spending time with Him in the Word and prayer. Relying on His indwelling Spirit. And treasuring the fellowship of His people.

That’s the path for change. That’s the way the deep needs are actually addressed.

*Application:*

Here’s an example. It’s been a long day and you’re looking forward to some peace and quiet. There’s nothing wrong with that. But the moment you get home, people make demands of you, complain to you, maybe even are frustrated with you. And so you lose it, fury unleashed – aloud or silently. You need to ask those questions, to look at the symptoms. And then look to the Savior. What were you after? Rest, shelter, restoration. Who is the real source for that?

Do you see? Our need runs deep. And so we must look to the Lord for real change.

**CONCLUSION:**

One of my favorite films from 2015 was Pixar’s “Inside Out”. I’d recommend it to all of you, no matter your age. The story revolves around Riley Anderson, an 11-year-old girl struggling with the upheaval of moving to a new city and enrolling in a new school. Pixar illustrates her emotional turmoil by taking us inside her mind where characters representing her five primary emotions – Joy, Sadness, Disgust, Fear, and Anger – are all wrestling for control.

“Inside Out” can help us explore how our emotions drive our behavior and impact our relationships. It’s also a reminder that’s there’s more going on below the surface than we often see – both in others and ourselves. And to address those deep issues demands deep solutions.

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