

This morning I am going to talk about change in your life and the empowered Word of God.

George Barna, the author said that if we could choose on word to describe the evangelical church in America today, the word would be apathetic. What's interesting, Barna writes, is that the church is not apathetic about worship. He says they've never been more zealous about worship, but he says the church is pretty much apathetic about living the Christian life.

Now, you may or may not agree with that. But think about that. If we are apathetic today how did we get that way?

I think that one of the reasons could be that when we become a Christian we have great expectations that our lives are going to change in a very dramatic way and it doesn't happen.

For many Christians, their life has a very constant pattern. They come to a church service, hear an uplifting sermon, or someone tells you to read a terrific book, and you do. You have a conversation with a friend who is a Christian and you are encouraged, or you go to a retreat and at that time there is tremendous conviction that something good is about to happen in your life. You resolve to make a fundamental change in your life and things are going to get better. So you go from a sort of renewed expectation to an energetic pursuit but then comes disappointment because you haven't done what you were enthusiastic about and you don't see how you can ever change your life.

We decide that we are no longer going to live a worldly existence but that we are going to change and follow a couple of verses in

Philippians 3----The very credentials these people are waving around as something special, I'm tearing up and throwing out with the trash----along with everything else I used to take credit for. **And why?**

Because of Christ. Yes, all the things I once thought were important are gone from my life. Compared to the high privilege of knowing Jesus Christ as my Master, firsthand. Everything I once thought I had going for me is insignificant-----dog dung.

I've dumped it all in the trash so that I could embrace Christ and be embraced by Him.-----I gave up all the inferior stuff so I could know Christ personally."

Maybe you felt that way when you became a Christian. Maybe you are still that way today.  
But maybe the Christian life isn't exactly turning out the way that we thought it would. We haven't changed the way that we thought that we would.

You might start asking yourself, 'What's wrong with me?'

Why don't I ever change?

Why is it that He often feels so far away? So historical?  
So church related? So other? The distance between knowing Him and knowing about Him is vast.

At that point, apathy starts to set in.  
You might even become cynical and wonder if a better life even exists?

Well, then you hear another sermon, read another book, talk to another friend, and go to another retreat. You are all fired up again, something greats going to take place in my life this time. But it doesn't.  
And the process is repeated.

I don't know about any of you but I can identify with that process

So, I think that you have to ask yourself, How can all of our good intentions lead us to not make fundamental changes?

How can we want to change so badly, and try so hard, but seem to change so little?

Maybe we continue to do the same things that we have always done to change that perhaps will never change.

Maybe we fail to realize that God is in the life changing business and we are not.

He has changed many, many peoples lives, not only in the past but also in the present.

As we go through our process, maybe we don't really repent. Maybe we just give lip service to God.

To repent means to see the sin in my life as God sees it. There has to be a sincerity in the way that I confess my sins to God like King David did.

Romans 6:11 says that you should, "**reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin.**"

If believers truly reckon themselves dead to sin, then they will prove their faith by yielding themselves to God.

The Living Bible says it this way, "**So look upon your sin nature as dead and unresponsive to sin, and instead be alive to God, alert to Him, through Jesus Christ our Lord.**"

We try to discover our self-worth and we already have it. *You have it in Him-----He died for you!*

And than in V 13, it says "**but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead.**"

The Living Bible says, "**Do not let any part of your bodies become tools of wickedness, to be used for sinning; but give yourselves completely to God---every part of you----for you are back from death and you want to be tools in the hands of God, to be used for His good purposes.**"

He said "**apart from Me you can do nothing**"

That includes changing

You don't change on the basis of anything that you do. You change on the basis of what God does in your life.

Galatians 2:20----It's a verse that many of you have memorized. It's probably the most famous verse in Galatians---"**I have been**

***crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”***

***I have been crucified with Christ.*** That’s just what we saw in Romans 6 a few minutes ago.

Not only am I ***dead to sin*** but ***Christ lives in me.***

That’s a foundational truth

How is God going to change you?

He is going to change you because Christ has taken up residency through the Holy Spirit in your life.

He is going to change you from the inside out.

The Bible says He is going to conform you to the image of His Son.

That process begins the moment you are saved and continues all the way to heaven.

If this is all true, Why are we struggling?

Why is it so hard for us to change?

It has to do in part to our perspective

We tithe and then some

We serve in various capacities in the church

We are good to our families

We even fast upon occasion

We spend time with our kids

What else is there to do? What does God require?

Israel felt that same way at one time. In the days of Micah the prophet, they filed a grievance with heaven. They seemed to be put out with God as He seemed to keep a distance between Himself and them.

Micah 6:6-7 With what shall I come to the Lord

And bow myself before the God on high?

Shall I come to Him with burnt offerings,

With yearling calves?

Does the Lord take delight in thousands of rams,

In ten thousand rivers of oil?

Shall I present my firstborn for my rebellious acts,  
The fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

And God answered in verse 8;  
And what does the Lord require of you,  
But to do justly,  
To love mercy,  
And to walk Humbly with your God?

Our God is a God of short lists. He doesn't ask much of us.  
The two greatest commandment are-----Love the Lord your God  
with all of your heart, soul, mind and strength and the second is Love  
your neighbor as yourself.

Turn with me, if you will to 2 Corinthians Ch. 4

In these verses Paul gives a different perspective than what you are  
going to hear from the televangelists today.

There were some things that Paul refused to do. He refused to use  
underhanded, deceitful practices to gain followers. False teachers  
were doing this very thing. We handle the Bible deceitfully by mixing  
philosophy and error with God's truth in order to win human approval.  
Not so with Paul. His ministry was honest.

So---- 2 Corinthians 4:7 from the Living Bible ***“But this precious  
treasure----this light and power that now shine within us---is  
held in a perishable container, that is, in our weak bodies.  
Everyone can see that the glorious power within must be from  
God and is not our own***

READ 8 & 9

Notice what Paul calls the Christian experience  
Hard pressed, perplexed, persecuted, struck down

Does that sound anything like your life?

But, lets look at those words again, he says he is  
Not crushed, not in depair, not forsaken, not destroyed  
Than in V10 READ

This translation is from the Living Bible and it says ***These bodies of ours are constantly facing death just as Jesus did; so it is clear to all that it is only the living Christ within who keeps us safe.***

Pauls willingness to suffer for Christ is one of the greatest proofs of his sincerety as a servant of God.

Galatians 2:20 again---***"I am crucified with Christ, it is no longer I who live but Christ lives in me"***

Some of you may be familiar with James McDonald. He is a Pastor and a very forceful one as he preaches God's word. He writes" I'm afraid that the Lord Jesus has looked down on my Christian experience and possibly said, This is it? This is what I rose from the dead for? This is the degree to which you are going to draw down My resurrection power? This is the degree that you are going to let Me live My life through you? This is the sum total? This is as good as it gets?

Jesus is saying, Look, I was raised from the dead to give them resurrection power. Power in their life right now. And that's it? That's all we get?

It's never an issue of our strength. Not ever. It's always an issue of His power.

It's not about reforming our lives. It's about allowing Him to empower our lives.

It's time that we get real about where Jesus fits in the overall picture of our lives. We have to come to grips with whether "He" or "me" will be the main feature of our existence.

You have to be careful about this. You can't be fully absorbed with yourself and be in pursuit of Jesus at the same time. You can't have it both ways.

I had another birthday last week and it reminds me that life doesn't go on forever. Jan is afraid that I am talking like an old man.. Well, I'm getting there. I've gotten beyond the idea that I'm bulletproof. And as I get a little older, I'm being drawn closer to the Lord. I've discovered that all of those wonderful plans and ideas that I've had over the years have'nt worked out quite like I thought they would. At least not all of them.

This is not a trip down memory lane but I can't help but think about what few accomplishments I may have mustered in my life. I have had many failures and still suffer from inadequacies and insecurities. See-----It's still about me. As much as I hate it and as much as I try to change it,---I still get in the way of what God wants for my life.

Change is necessary in our lives if we are to be used By god for His purposes.

The real change comes when we allow Jesus to empower our lives. That's when real change comes.

Turn with me to 1 Thessalonians 5

Paul has a pattern in all of his epistles. In the first part he tells us how wonderful it is to be a Christian and than in the second part he will always say, now what are you going to do about it. He says because this is true, this is how you should live your life.

So now 1Thess. 5.

I don't know about you but when I read some of these chapters and verse, I come away feeling guilty. There are expectations that God has of me and if I'm honest with myself, against these expectations-----, sometimes I don't come out so well.

But as Christians grade on a curve, I can say to myself, that as long as I'm ahead of some of these folks, I'm okay. God doesn't see it that way, but I do.

So here in 1 Thess. 5 He gives us 14 commandments. At least that's my count.

Lets start in V 14

***Now we exhort you brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all.***

Notice that he says all. Not some or a few or those people, but all.

How do you deal with that commandment?

How many unruly people have you admonished lately not counting, husbands, wives, or children.

***V15, See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all.*** There's that word all again.

***V16 Rejoice always***

***V17 pray without ceasing***

***V18 In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you***

***V19 Do not quench the Spirit*** *Quench means to put out a light or fire*

#### **Do not quench the Spirit**

***V20 Do not despise prophecies*** That means don't look down on Bible studies or be indifferent to the Word of God.

***V21 Test all things. Hold fast to what is good*** This means to prove all things. Don't be taken in. Don't be a sucker. Bill Goodrich, the HCF pastor on the NE side, said many years ago to check out what he was teaching. Don't just take his word for it. Dave would tell you the same thing.

***V22 Abstain from every form of evil*** If there is a question in your mind whether something is right or wrong, then it is wrong for you.



Now there is one more in V 27 ***Greet all the brethren with a holy kiss*** Just make sure it's a holy kiss. In our culture, a hand shake will probably do.

After reading these 14 commandments, you could come away from them thinking, man, I'm a total failure.

But look at V 23 ***Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely***

**Look at the word sanctify. Webster's says it means "to set apart to a sacred purpose or to a religious use."**

In other words, Who is going to set me apart? Me or God?

Who is going to change Jerry? Jerry? NO

God does it completely.

He says this is MY Word

I heard somewhere that someone said, "the Christian is not a difficult life to live, It's impossible

It's impossible for us to do these things but it's not impossible for God

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Look again at V23-----Is God going to sanctify you? | YES |
| Is God going to preserve us blameless?              | YES |

Galatian 2:20 again I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live but Christ in me.

Now turn to Colossians 3

This is the same as the other epistles. Paul is going to tell us how great it is to be a Christian and then he is going to tell us how we should live our lives.

Read v 5 same as Romans 6

V8

V9

V12

V13

V14

V15

How do I do these things?

V16, 17

Read 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 4:1

So what's the conclusion?

Go to John 15:5 The answer is pretty simple but very difficult

I am the vine and you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.

We have talked about a number of things that you can do to live the bountiful Christian life. The most important choice that we can make is to give it all to God. To live in His Word, to trust Him and than to reap the rewards of His love and grace.

Lets Pray