If God Made Me This Way, Why Do I Need To Change?
Questions That Leave a Mark • Grace Baptist Church • Grace Groups Fellowship Bible Studies

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Bob Dylan sang, *The Times They Are a-Changin’* in the sixties. Today, times are still in flux. We want Borders secured, but online shopping and the digital age sealed its fate. As people started buying more hard covers for their iPads, and Amazon kindled interests in e-books, the second largest American bookstore chain was forced to file for bankruptcy. What Borders failed to do was change with the times. However, you can still stroll down aisles at Barnes & Noble and see shelves full of books. They embraced the digital media nook, changed early, and offered online shopping, as well as the in-store experience.

Business schools teach companies that they must reinvent themselves in the marketplace if they want to survive. The concept is called creative destruction. Kodak, an American icon that invented the digital camera, was slow to recognize the potential of the electronic revolution. They did not invest in their own invention, but let others take the lead. After years of struggling to catch up, they filed for bankruptcy, too. It was surely a Kodak Moment nobody saw coming. After 133 years in business, a digital mama took our Kodachrome away.

Change occurs in all aspects of life – not just business. Walk into the Self-Help section at Barnes & Noble, and you’ll find that mankind also realizes its need for change. The shelves are full of books competing to open our minds – not to mention our wallets and purses.

There are many good self-help books that can help us with time management problems, over-eating, or financial fiascos. But when it comes to a change that God demands, we must go to a book that contains answers from God — not man. And we must ask, what does God’s word say about change? Can we really change ourselves, or is it something that only God can do? Let’s look at the Scriptures.

**Why does God want us to change?**

**Jeremiah 4:4 NLT**  O people of Judah and Jerusalem, surrender your _______ and power. _______ your _______ before the Lord, or my _______ will burn like an unquenchable fire because of all your _______.

God wants us to change because He is angry with us due to our _______. King David wrote:

**Psalm 139:23-24 NLT**  23 Search me, O God, and know my _______; test me and know my anxious thoughts. 24 Point out _______ in me that offends you, and _______ me along the _______ of everlasting life.

God wants us to change so we can enjoy eternal life. But can we change ourselves?
Jeremiah 13:22-25 NIV 23 Can the Ethiopian ______ his skin or the leopard its spots? ______ can you do _____ who are accustomed to doing ______. 24 “I will scatter you like chaff driven by the desert wind. 25 This is your lot, the portion I have decreed for you,” declares the Lord, “because you have forgotten ___ and trusted in ______ gods.”

Psalm 53:2-3 NLT 2 God looks down from heaven on the ______ human race; he looks to see if anyone is truly wise, if anyone seeks God. 3 But no, ____ have turned away; ____ have become corrupt. No one does _____, not a single _____!

God warned the people through the prophet Ezekiel that He would punish sinners:

Ezekiel 18:20-29 NCV  The person who _____ is the one who will ____. A child will not be punished for a parent’s sin, and a parent will not be punished for a child’s sin. Those who do right will enjoy the results of their own ___________; evil people will ________ the results of their own ________.

Ezekiel 18:30-32 NCV 30 “So I will _______ you, people of Israel; I will judge each of you by what you ___, says the Lord God. Change your ________ and _____ all your sinning so sin will not bring your ruin. 31 Get rid of all the sins you have done, and get for yourselves a _____ heart and a new way of thinking. Why do you want to die, people of Israel? 32 I do not want anyone to die, says the Lord God, so _____ your hearts and lives so you may live.

It seems that man is incapable, by his own effort, to produce the change God desires, yet God always demands that we be good and do good. If we are not good and do not live well, we suffer the consequences, but God doesn’t want us to die, so He tells us to change. So, if God wants me to change, and I find I cannot change myself, how can it be done? Well, God tells us:

Ezekiel 36:16-32 NLT 26 And I will give you a ____ heart, and I will put a ____ spirit in you. I will take ____ your stony, stubborn heart and _____ you a tender, responsive heart. 27 And I will put my Spirit in you so that you will ______ my decrees and be careful to ______ my regulations.

God promised to give His people a new heart and a new spirit – His Spirit. But in America, many have a spirit of individualism, and we often rely on false gods. One of those false gods is our own ability. We trust ourselves to get any job done, even the job of being good enough for God. After all, we’re not as bad as other people. We’re not Islamic terrorists, murderers from the inner city, pedophiles, or horrendous thieves like Bernie Madoff. We view ourselves as good people in comparison to them. However, the problem with good people is that we’ve all graduated from The Frank Sinatra School of Theology. When it comes to being acceptable to God, many Americans proudly sing, “I’ll do it my way.” But God says:

Isaiah 55:7 NIV  Let the wicked _______ their ways and banish the very thought of doing _______. Let them _____ to the Lord that he may have ______ on them. Yes, turn to our God, for he will __________ generously.

It seems that the first step in changing the way we are and the way we act is to turn to God for mercy and forgiveness. It’s the reason that God sent His Son to shed His blood and die. Someone had to pay for sin. As sinners, we all deserve to pay, but our merciful God sent a substitute.
If you lived at the time when Jesus came to earth, the go to guys for questions about God were the religious leaders of the time – the Pharisees. However, when Jesus arrived and people flocked to Him, the Pharisees did not like Him, for He was a threat to their power and influence. Christ represented huge change, and the Pharisees were set in their ways. They saw no need for change. They saw no need to ask Him for help of any kind.

A man in a hot air balloon realized he was lost, so he reduced altitude and spotted a woman below. He descended a bit more, swallowed his pride, and shouted, "Excuse me, can you help me? I promised a friend I would meet him an hour ago, but I don't know where I am."

The woman below replied, "You're in a hot air balloon hovering approximately 30 feet above the ground. You're between 27 and 28 degrees north latitude and between 82 and 83 degrees west longitude."

"You must be an engineer," said the balloonist.

"I am," replied the woman. "How did you know?"

"Well," answered the balloonist, "everything you told me is technically correct, but I've no idea what to make of your information, and the fact is, I'm still lost. Frankly, you've not been much help at all. If anything, you've delayed my trip."

The woman below responded, "You must be in management."

"I am," replied the balloonist, "but how did you know?"

"Well," said the woman, "you don't know where you are or where you're going. You have risen to where you are due to a large quantity of hot air. You made a promise which you've no idea how to keep, and you expect people beneath you to solve your problems. The fact is, you are in exactly the same position you were in before we met, but now, somehow, it's my fault."

We can find plenty of information in self-help books that may be technically correct when it comes to spiritual matters, for most writers would agree that nobody is perfect. We all make mistakes. Yes, some may even call a few of those mistakes sin. Yet, their answers on how to deal with sin usually involve human effort. They recognize a need for change, but their recipe for changing human behavior changes nothing in the eyes of God, for it deals only with external change designed to satisfy other people. And those who follow their advice remain lost.

One night, a man realized his need to clarify his thinking. Under the cover of darkness, to cover his status as a religious person, a Pharisee named Nicodemus came to visit Jesus secretly. He recognized God’s stamp of approval on Christ’s life. But before he could ask a single question, Jesus made a statement that caused Nicodemus, a seasoned religious leader, to wonder about where he was going with what he believed.

John 3:1-9 NLT

1 There was a man named Nicodemus, a Jewish religious leader who was a Pharisee. 2 After dark one evening, he came to speak with Jesus. “Rabbi,” he said, “we all know that _____ has sent you to ________ us. Your miraculous signs are ___________ that God is with you.” 3 Jesus replied, “I tell you the _______, unless you are ______  ________, you cannot see the Kingdom of God.” 4 “What do you mean?” exclaimed Nicodemus. “How can an old man go back into his mother’s womb and be born again?” 5 Jesus replied, “I assure you, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of ________ and the ___________. 6 Humans can reproduce _____ human life, but the Holy Spirit gives birth to ____________ life. 7 So don’t be surprised when I say, ‘You _____ be born again.’ 8 The wind blows wherever it _______. Just as you can hear the wind but can’t tell where it comes from or where it is going, so you can’t explain how people are _____ of the Spirit.” 9 “How are these things ______________?” Nicodemus asked.
Nicodemus tries to understand a spiritual principle with human thinking. Basically, he says, “Hey, I’m an old guy, and old guys don’t like change. So how am I supposed to get back inside my mother’s womb at my age and size? Is Rick Moranis available?” Nicodemus thinks Christ is giving him an impossible assignment, and as we shall see, it is, for God’s word tells us:

Luke 18:18-27 NIV 27 Jesus replied, “What is impossible with men is possible with ____.”

Nicodemus, like the rich young ruler, followed the law. As a Pharisee, he followed rules from God and many more rules added by the Sanhedrin. The Pharisees had come to believe that following rules made one fit for God’s Kingdom. But now, Jesus was saying that a person had to be born again to see the kingdom of God. Which is it? Jesus continued:

John 3:16-21 NCV 16 “God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son so that whoever __________ in him may not be ______, but have eternal life. 17 God did not send his Son into the world to judge the world guilty, but to _____ the world through him. 18 People who __________ in God's Son are not judged ________. Those who do not believe have already been judged guilty, because they have not believed in God's one and only Son.

Galatians 2:16 NLT 16 Yet we know that a person is made _______ with God by ________ in Jesus Christ, not by obeying the ____. And we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we might be made right with God because of our faith in ________, not because we have obeyed the law. For no one will _____ be made right with God by obeying the law.

Galatians 5:17-18 NLT 17 The sinful nature wants to do _____, which is just the ___________ of what the Spirit wants. And the Spirit ________ us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly __________ each other, so you are not free to carry out your ______ intentions. 18 But when you are directed by the ________ , you are not under obligation to the _____ of Moses.

1 Peter 1:3-5 NASB 3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great _______ has caused us to be **born again** to a living hope through the ______________ of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to **obtain** an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in __________ for you, 5 who are protected by the ________ of God through _______ for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

Who caused us to be born again? ________________

When you are born again, it is from **God alone. But what about after we are born again?** Scripture is clear that we cannot obey the law to garner favor with God. However:

1 Peter 1:22-23 NLV 22 You have made your souls pure by __________ the ________ through the ______ ________. This has given you a true ______ for the Christians. Let it be a true love from the ________ . 23 You have been given a new _______. It was from a seed that cannot die. This new ______ is from the **Word** of God which lives forever.

How did you obey this time? ___________________________________
Is there some sort of **creative destruction** that needs to occur in the life of a born again believer? Do we need to put forth our best effort to change so we can please God? Do we need to put forth our best effort to fool others in the church so that they will think we don’t swear, chew, or date girls who do? After we become Christians, we have a tendency to try and perform as *good* Christians. It’s a common problem, especially in America, where effort and hard work has been rewarded. However, if we think we can produce the Christian life by personal effort, it’s a recipe for disaster.

It is human nature to think that you owe God for what he has given you. It is also human nature to think that now that you know the Bible a little, now that you know a little bit about prayer, or now that you may understand a little about talking to others about God…now it’s time to take on the responsibility of being a “good Christian.” There is nothing that will more quickly zap your joy in knowing God. Marilyn Adamson

If we try to keep the law, we miss the **abundant life** that Jesus promised. When we become consumed with following rules, we forfeit grace and find frustration. When we try to please God by our best effort, we are no longer walking by faith in the power of the Holy Spirit. God doesn’t want us to trust in our own ability to live the Christian life. God wants us to depend on Him as He works in our life to produce the life He desires. God not only **makes us holy**, but He wholly intends to continue His work in your life and mine:

**Romans 8:29 NIV**  For those God ___________ he also _______________ to be conformed to the ___________ of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among _______ brothers.

**Philippians 1:4-6 NIV**  4 In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with _____ 5 because of your _______________ in the gospel from the first day until now, 6 being confident of this, that he who _______ a good work in you _____ carry it on to _____________ until the day of Christ Jesus.

Paul recognized that it takes hard work to change, but he recognized that real change came by the grace of God and through being led by the Holy Spirit:

**1 Corinthians 15:10 NLT**  But whatever I am now, it is all because God poured out his special ________ on me—and not without results. For I have _________ harder than any of the other apostles; yet it was not __ but ____ who was working through me by his _______.

**Romans 7:4-6 NLT**  4 So, my dear brothers and sisters, **this is the point**: You ______ to the power of the law when you died with Christ. And now you are ___________ with the one who was ___________ from the dead. As a result, we can produce a harvest of good _______ for God. 5 When we were controlled by our old nature, sinful desires were at work within us, and the ____ aroused these evil desires that produced a harvest of _________ deeds, resulting in death. 6 But now we have been _____________ from the law, for we died to it and are no longer _________ to its power. Now we can serve God, not in the _____ way of _________ the letter of the _____, but in the ____ way of ____ in the Spirit.

**Ephesians 4:21-32 NLT**  21 Since you have heard about Jesus and have learned the ________ that comes from him, 22 throw off your ____ sinful nature and your former way of life, which is corrupted by lust and deception. 23 Instead, let the Spirit __________ your thoughts and attitudes. 24 Put on your new nature, created to be like God—truly righteous and holy.
Romans 12:2 NLT  Don’t copy the _____________ and customs of this world, but let God _____________ you into a new person by changing the way you ________. Then you will learn to know God’s ______ for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.

How can we change our thinking to reflect this new life we now have?

First, let’s look at the contrast of the old life to the new, Christian life:

Galatians 5:19-26 NLT  19 When you _________ the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear: sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, 20 idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, 21 envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these. Let me tell you again, as I have before, that anyone living that sort of life will ____ inherit the Kingdom of God.  22 But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, _____________, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, and self-control. There is no ____ against these things! 24 Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to his cross and crucified them there. 25 Since we are __________ by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit’s __________ in every part of our lives.

Our job is to follow. It’s what sheep do!

1 Peter 2:1 -3 NLT  1 So get rid of all _____ behavior. Be done with all deceit, hypocrisy, jealousy, and all unkind speech. 2 Like newborn babies, you must crave pure ____________ milk so that you will _____ into a full experience of salvation. Cry out for this nourishment, 3 now that you have had a taste of the Lord’s kindness.

Our job is to read, study, memorize, meditate, pray about, apply, and share God’s word. As we do those things, the Spirit of God works within us. We grow, and there is change that matters. That change started when God moved us from death to life, when we were born again. It continues each day as God pours out His grace upon us, molds us into images of Christ, and uses us to reflect His love to a world that desperately needs change — change that only He can bring.

Memory Verse

21 It is God who enables us, along with you, to stand firm for Christ. He has commissioned us,

22 and he has identified us as his own by placing the Holy Spirit in our hearts as the first installment that guarantees everything he has promised us.

2 Corinthians 1:21-22 NLT

And everything includes changing us to be like Christ!

See you next week!