

Transformed by Jesus  
Sermon March 12, 2017

Is it possible to change a person's personality? If someone wants to be a different person, can he change himself, and how?

Once there was a conference about this topic. Participants came from different backgrounds and formed a quite lively debate on this topic as they had different opinions. At the beginning of discussion, parents and educators started to complain about the fact that, these days, it is more and more difficult to deal with young people. They are not interested in anything. Most of them are disrespectful, and nobody can coordinate them. They cannot have an impact on their hearts, nor on their way of thinking. One person made a short comment saying that this is his own problem as well. He wants to change but he cannot. He tried many times, but he had many relapses and now he had given up on changing.

People started to bring up different proposals saying: ignorance is causing all these problems; people don't know how to behave and we have to teach them with more severity; people are not familiar with the 10 Commandments, with God and with God's expectations. A teacher quoted the philosophical teaching style from the beginning of 19<sup>th</sup> century, saying that it would be enough to teach them more ethical norms. She suggested that we should teach them to learn what is good and what is wrong, and they will be good. This type of education was followed by two horrible World Wars. It seems that only teaching people what is right and what is wrong won't make them good people. Another teacher said that teaching is not enough. Education is so much more than communication. It is not enough only to teach, but also to educate. The pedagogy can be beautiful.

Somebody opposed, saying that education is not enough, because the genes determine everything. Somebody said that with self-control you can achieve great results.

Then another person came along suggesting that meditation is the redemption, and some different trainings. An enthusiastic young person said that the positive way of thinking and positive imagination can change everything. He suggested that we just have to focus very hard of what we want to achieve, or the way we want to, and we will get it. So I have to imagine that I am beautiful, smart, rich, and successful, and then I will be. This is the solution, he said.

Then another person stood up saying: We are Christians. Maybe God by His grace could help us to change. But we believe that we have to earn His grace with good work, because He cannot give to us for free. Another person said that God will give His grace only to those who will try very hard to change themselves.

Most participants seemed to like this suggestion and they started to analyze it. What does it mean to struggle to change? How can you earn God's grace? How much do we have to pray? What is enough and what is too much? How can you know if you prayed enough for something?

Somebody was very pessimistic, saying: If somebody was born with a bad personality and a bad nature, not even God can change him.

Another pessimistic person said that we should not believe that we can change ourselves because we are sinners and weak. But we have to believe that God is good and He can forgive our mistakes. We can try our best and sometimes we win, sometimes we lose. We cannot be Jesus Christ, he said. He said that, according to his way of thinking, God keeps a record about our good and bad actions. Our responsibility is to balance our sin with good actions. Then he said: I think as we are getting older we will sin less and less. After this comment, an elderly gentleman stood up saying: I don't experience this in the retirement home, where I live.

Finally, someone who listened carefully and thoughtfully during the whole conversation said: I am telling you honestly that, for a long time, I tried to change. If I found a church with open doors, I went in to pray, but I was not able to change. If I made some great result, I always relapsed. Then I was a hypocrite and I pretended that I changed, but in reality I did not. For this, I am very disappointed. I think the Bible is not for me. I gave up trying to change myself or to pray. Sometimes my conscience is accusing me but I have learned how to silence it.

After this honest disclosure, everybody became silent. People were digesting what they just heard. Then a minister broke the silence, asking if there was anybody who could report that they know somebody who was able to change permanently or changed somebody? There was a deep silence again.

Then the minister continued quietly with a deep humbleness saying: I know people who struggled a lot with their personality, and they were able to make visible and spectacular changes. They got rid of the

alcohol, they fixed their marital problems, and their children loved and enjoyed them again. These were not temporary but lasting changes.

In a special way, this change always coincided with the fact that these people met Jesus Christ in a very personal way. These people took seriously what the Bible says about Jesus Christ. They understood that Jesus came into this world to give us a fully happy and joyful life. He came to take our sin upon His shoulder, and he died for us on the cross. Because of Him, all our sins are forgiven. When they recognized their sin and laid their lives upon Jesus, their lives have been changed.

People who met them confessed, saying: You are a different person. And this was true. Then step by step, they changed their vocabulary, their behaviours, their temper, their interactions, and their work moral. Everything had been changed in their behaviour, because something in their hearts and in their heads had been changed, just because they understood what Jesus Christ has done for them and just because they allowed Jesus Christ to be their Lord and Saviour. After they accepted Jesus in their lives, Jesus Christ started to grow in them and Jesus helped to make changes. This is how the Holy Spirit works in those who accepted Jesus Christ in their lives.

God, in the Bible, offers us this way. Jesus Christ allows us to get access to His power. Those who accepted Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, will do His work. The Bible tells us that even though we try seriously to change our lives, we don't have enough wisdom and power to change. God has to intervene, and He can change us completely. Jesus is offering this great opportunity in our Scripture reading to Nicodemus.

Nicodemus wanted to change. Even though he was old, and a well respected leader, he was unhappy with himself. He felt that something was missing in life. Jesus told him exactly what he was missing. Jesus said to him: Nicodemus, you know a lot about God but you are not in a living relationship with the living God. Nicodemus, you still don't know for sure that, after you die, you will inherit the glory of God in heaven. But you can be connected right now with the living God, and you can be sure right now that you will be in heaven, if you will be born again. That means that if you accept Jesus Christ, a new life will start to grow in you. This new life is coming from above, from heaven. I cannot produce it in my own body or mind.

This is exactly the way Jesus was conceived in the womb of Mary, in her human body. She heard the word that God has a message for her. She took it seriously, and the Holy Spirit became flesh inside her. This is how Jesus' human body was conceived.

This is also our case: we hear the word of God as we read the Bible, or as we listen to the sermon, and, as a result, we open our hearts and we allow God to talk to us. We believe in His words. If I accept Him, a new life will be conceived in me. This comes from God, and it is not something that I create in me.

So the Bible does not say that God will help us to be better, but says that God will create a new life in us. The new life will come, not through development, education, and teaching, but through the word of Creator God. God will not fix the old one but will create a new one, and we will have the nature of Jesus.

The Bible says that we have a great opportunity to change. We can help those people who honestly and seriously want to change. But this is not like somebody thinking that we decide to change and we invite God to help us. He is not a business man to whom we can give more prayer and He will give us a few better qualities of behaviour. God is not measuring our good and bad actions. The Bible says that God will CREATE in us a new personality. At the beginning of time He said "LET IT BE !!!" and with His power, God created things with His words. Today, for those who embrace and include God's words in their lives, His words will create a new life in us. Jesus wanted to help Nicodemus to understand that only those who are born again from the power which comes from above will inherit the Glory of God.

David King had a big weakness. He liked to watch pretty women and this took him down. After He embraced the word of God, in his prayer he says: "CREATE in me a new heart, O Lord". He did not say that ... Lord help me not to keep my eyes on pretty women but help me to take my eyes away from them, help me not to have a desire to be with them ... His prayer is: CREATE in me a NEW, CLEAN HEART, so when I will see a pretty woman I may not have any sinful thoughts or feelings. He is not asking God to fix his heart but to CREATE in him a new heart.

Paul confessed that his old life was crucified with Jesus, and now he lives in Jesus Christ. This is what God is offering to all of us today: Jesus' life in me. I am not going to be better, but accepting Jesus as

my Saviour, next to my sinful life, another clean personality will start to grow. Jesus's personality will grow in me.

The person who said that we cannot be Jesus Christ, was right. There is only ONE Jesus Christ. But He can live in us through our faith and we will become very similar to Him. It doesn't mean that we don't have to learn or to teach our children. We have to. But we cannot totally change them nor ourselves. This is why we need Jesus Christ.

In order to be changed, I need a lot of humbleness. I have to reach the point when I realize that I have to be changed; I tried many times but I relapsed, but I won't give up to be a new person.

The first question is: do you want to change, or are you happy with yourself as you are? (A few months ago, I had a conversation with somebody about this topic who said to me: Frank I am already 80 years old, and you want to tell me that I am still a sinner?)

The second question is: Do we want to be born again in order to enter into heaven? YES and NO ???

Those who delay to say YES now, their answer is NO.

In John 3:36, Jesus says a very important thing: "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but wrath of God abides on him."

Let us rejoice knowing that God's grace is offering us a new life now. Let us rejoice seeing that the gate of heaven is open for us and we can enter in. We embrace Jesus and He will start His work in us. He will show us how we have to grow step by step. We will wonder the most in how many things we have changed. Let it be.