

INCORNERSTONE BIBLE INSTITUTE INCONTEXT

by Dave Georgeff

Effecting Spiritual Change

I once was counseling with a young man on issues of his thought life and consequent sinful behavior. He was in deep need of change in his life-spiritual change. Over a period of years sinful behavioral patterns had taken root and were bringing him in a downward spiral of sin. He needed hope. He needed encouragement. This man shared with me that someone else (very close to him) had suggested that all of his problems were of a psychological nature and that, therefore, what he really needed was a “professional” psychologist/psychiatrist. Unfortunately, this attitude is common in our day—even among believers. The “experts” of our day will tell us that wrong behavior is simply an “addiction” that requires years of therapy. They will condescendingly tell us that the Word of God is not relevant for today.

How is genuine spiritual change wrought in people today? We know that ultimately God Himself is the One who saves and that God Himself is the One who transforms the soul into Christlikeness. Any and all change that is wrought is done by God Himself. No man can change himself spiritually. The same God who can miraculously save is the same God who can miraculously transform the soul. How can a minister

of God be an agent of change in others?

The answer to the above question is singular-by skillfully applying the all-sufficient Word of God to souls of those in need of spiritual change. The Word of

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God which shows us the Person of Christ is the only sufficient remedy for the spiritual needs of the soul of man. There are at least three key Scriptures that clearly affirm the Bible’s sufficiency to perform such change. **The first one** is 2 Peter 1:3-4 (NKJV): “... His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these

you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.”

Clearly the believer has everything that is needed for living and for godliness. The Christian has in the Person of the Holy Spirit and in the Word of God all that he needs to be all that God wants him to be. In 2 Peter 1:3 the term “life” has to do with everything that we experience this side of heaven. “Godliness” deals with our relationship with God—living a life that is God-centered.

Peter proceeds to define the phrase “all things that pertain to life and godliness.” He says Christians have become “partakers of the divine nature” (v. 4). Believers have been “born from above.” Believers have a totally new nature. “Life and godliness” are possible because our Lord has given the believer a new nature. Other places in Scripture speak of this new nature See Rom. 6:1-11; 2 Cor. 5:17; Col. 3:10; 1 Peter 1:23. Peter says that this “divine nature” has the ability to escape “the corruption that is in the world through lust [evil desires]” (2Peter 1:4). As Christians we have the spiritual ability to develop a qualitatively different life. We have the necessary resources given to us from God Himself. Therefore, Christians can cultivate faith, moral excellence, true

knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and Christian love (2 Peter 1:4-7).

How does the believer appropriate that which Peter calls “all things that pertain to life and godliness”? In v. 3 Peter says appropriation comes “through the knowledge of Him who called us...” The warehouse of everything we need for life and godliness is found in the person of God and in the Word of God.

John MacArthur writes in his book *Our Sufficiency In Christ* (pg. 25-27) about a man who had been shut out of a house on a cold night. This man obviously suffered from exposure to the cold conditions. All of his suffering could have been avoided had the man known that the key to the house was in his pocket. MacArthur’s point is that believers have in Christ everything they will ever need to handle any and all of life’s hardships. There are no other resources, no other spiritual assets, no other heavenly riches which the believer in Christ needs to have. Don’t be like the man who had all that he needed to escape the cold but did not. Remember the words of Peter: “His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us” (2 Peter 1:3). It isn’t that we need some kind of higher anything. His all-sufficient resources which are found in the written and living Word of God are all that is needed to change the human heart.

The apostle Paul personalizes the theology of 2 Peter 1:3-4 when he writes in Philippians 3:10-12 (NKJV), “That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death.... Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.” The Apostle Paul knew that his spiritual growth was tied to knowing Christ-the Living Word. In Romans 12:2

Paul buttresses this by saying believers are “transformed by the renewing of [their] mind[s].” Spiritual change is effected by the Word of God acting upon the soul of man.

When the Apostle Paul arrived in Thessalonica, having just gone through a difficult ordeal in Philippi (Acts 16,17), he preached the Word of God to the Jews first and then to the Gentiles located there. Later, Paul wrote the Thessalonians from Corinth, and he said, “...We also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the Word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the Word of

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God, which effectively works in you who believe. For you ... became imitators of the churches of God... (1 Thess. 2:13-14). Dramatic change was wrought by the application of the Word of God to the souls of men. The Thessalonians believed and became imitators/examples of Christ. As my pastor recently said, “It was not a matter of Paul first developing relationships, but of simply speaking with boldness the truth which changes lives.” It is the truth of God’s Word that changes lives. You and I are just “delivery boys”-we speak the Word, and the Holy Spirit applies it to the soul of man.

Another key text is found in Psalm 19:7-11. David calls Scripture the following: perfect, sure, right, authoritative, clean, providing insights, more

desirable than gold, and sweeter than honey. Furthermore, the Psalmist not only describes God’s Word, but he also tells us what it is able to do. The Word can: convert the soul, make wise the simple, rejoice the heart, and enlighten the eyes. There is so much richness in this 19th Psalm!

Finally, I want to highlight five character traits from 2 Timothy 3:15-17. The Apostle Paul declares God’s Word to be holy, able, inspired by God (“God-breathed”), profitable and useful, and it can thoroughly equip the man of God for every good work. With this kind of inspired apostolic endorsement, what else does the Christian need to effect spiritual change in others? Certainly Psalm 119:11 echoes the very heart of this issue: “Your Word I have hidden in my heart that I might not sin against You.”



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