

As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby. - 1 Peter 2:2

THE SINCERE MILK OF GOD'S WORD

The word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword... - Hebrews 4:12

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“People Don't Change”

The phrase “people don't change” might be used to “justify” sin that “cannot be stopped.” Though this phrase sounds wise to some, God's Word teaches differently. Though most people do not change as God desires, some people *do*, and everyone *can*.

Consider the apostle Peter, who denied Jesus three times (**Matt. 26:69-75**), yet later had the faith to be an elder of a local church (**1 Pet. 5:1**).

Consider the Jews Peter spoke to on Pentecost, who were directly responsible for Jesus' crucifixion (**Acts 2:36**), yet chose to give their lives to the One they had delivered up (**Acts 2:41-47**).

Consider Saul of Tarsus / the apostle Paul, who persecuted Jesus and His followers (**Acts 9:4-5**), yet later dedicated his life to preaching that Jesus is the Son of God (**Acts 9:20**).

These individuals had sinned drastically. Yet, they still had a chance to be saved.

This chance was contingent on changing. On truly *repenting*. This is the answer we must give when sin is in our lives. The answer is not to say “that's just who I am,” but to “*go, and sin no more*” (**John 8:11**).

In **1 Corinthians 6:9-11**, we find an example of individuals who had changed drastically. In **verses 9-10**, the Holy Spirit

through Paul noted some sins of immorality, saying, “*Or don't you know that the unrighteous will not inherit God's kingdom? Don't be deceived. Neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor male prostitutes, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor slanderers, nor extortionists, will inherit God's kingdom.*”

Verse 11 then says, “*such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.*”

This verse shows that those guilty of fornication, homosexual conduct, covetousness, drunkenness, gossip, or any other sin alluded to in **verses 9-10** cannot justifiably claim, “That's just who I am and I can't help it.” The same is true with anything God defines as sin.

Notice also the change that's alluded to in **1 Peter 4:3**: *For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles...* Like the Christians Peter wrote to, we can give up lustful and sinful ways.

Regardless of our past, we have the ability to change in ways God demands. The path of correction is there. By choosing this path, we can look at sin and say “such was I, but I'm different now. I've been cleansed. I've been sanctified. I'm walking in ‘*newness of life*’” (**Rom. 6:4**).

The Rich Man and Lazarus

Luke 16:19-31 contains the familiar account of the “*rich man*” (**verse 19**) and a “*beggar named Lazarus*” (**verse 20**).

While on earth, the rich man had many temporal comforts (**verse 19**), while Lazarus had it rough (**verses 20-21**).

The tables were turned, though, when the two died. **Verses 22-31** give perhaps the most detailed picture in Scripture of the Hadean realm, which departed souls enter while awaiting the Day of Judgment. These verses speak of Lazarus being in “*Abraham’s bosom*” (**verse 22**), a term that shows the comfort Lazarus enjoyed there (cf. **verse 25**). The rich man, on the other hand, was in a part of Hades referred to as “*torments*” (**verse 23**; cf. **verse 28**). This term demonstrates the anguish suffered by those in it (cf. **verse 25**).

The rich man was in so much pain that he asked for Lazarus to “*dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool [his] tongue*” (**verse 24**).

He wished some things could change when his soul was in torment. He was told by Abraham, though, that there is a “*great gulf fixed*” between those in comfort and those in torment, and no one can pass from one side to the other (**Luke 16:26**). He was further shown that opportunities to exhort his family to prepare for physical death had ceased (**verses 27-31**).

This passage gives us a striking portrait

of how different things truly are from how they often appear. While the rich man appeared to “have it made” during his time on earth, the poor beggar was truly in a far better state than him. Notice the contrast brought out in **verse 25**. There Abraham told the rich man, “*Son, remember that you, in your lifetime, received your good things, and Lazarus, in the same way, bad things. But here he is now comforted, and you are in anguish.*”

The rich man wasn’t wrong for being materially wealthy, but his riches profited him nothing when his time on earth ended. On the other hand, Lazarus may have been deemed a failure by the world. He had little of what most consider to be important. Yet, by pleasing God, Lazarus had far greater riches than anything the world can offer (cf. **1 Tim. 6:6**; **Rev. 2:9**).

This passage also demonstrates the “time limit” God has given for us to obey Him. When we pass away or Judgment Day comes (whichever occurs first), it will be too late to change our fate. Wishing, like the rich man, to modify our fate, will do no good. What *will* do us good is to prepare, like Lazarus, while there is time.

The account of the rich man and Lazarus helps us understand what is truly important. During our relatively brief time on earth (cf. **James 4:14**), may we live in such a way that we will be comforted, and not tormented, when our souls depart.

-Michael Hickox (both articles)

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