



Can You Change?

When I was in college, my psychology professor asked the class, "Why do you feel like you always have to answer the phone?" This was before robocalls and cell phones. It was a sort of revelation to us that it was not a rule of the universe that when the phone rings you have to answer. You can just let the phone ring. The professor was in fact opening up for our thinking a much bigger question in life, one that fundamentally brought me into the study of psychology. Several years before, I met a group of guys who were all broken in one way or another. They were partying constantly and using drugs to mask their pain. Far too young to give up on their lives, all of them were around nineteen years old and had for one reason or another been kicked out of their homes. Over the course of less than a week, each one came to me privately and separately wanting to know what made me so different from them. The question behind the question was this, "Can I change the direction of my life?" What my professor was questioning is actually fundamental to the fields of psychology and theology. "Is it possible to change the way I am?"

The field of psychology has two distinctly different takes on this question. 1. Each person can and does change over time. You can completely reinvent yourself given enough effort and outside help. 2. You are established as you are and the fundamental aspect of who you are is locked in place. Minimal change is possible, but your personality is set in stone due to either your genetic construction or your early childhood experiences. John the Apostle in his letter 1 John has this to say, **What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have observed and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—** (1 John 1: 1 CSB) What is John talking about here? He is about to embark on a discussion of Christ and His impact on human functioning. The "word of life" is code for Jesus Christ, God in flesh. John wrote this letter under the inspiration and direction of God to tell us about Christ and how He impacts you both now and for eternity.

John says something rather astounding about Jesus. Literally, the first phrase of verse one reads, "what was always being from the beginning". This is a fascinating way of putting it. The word of life has always been, continually been what it is, or to be more precise, He has always been who He is. The same idea about God is presented in both the New and Old Testaments. **Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.** (James 1: 17 NIV) **But you remain the same, and your years will never end.** (Psalm 102:27 NIV) God doesn't become more loving over time or less decisive about sin. He is unchanging in His personality and the same in every part of eternity. You can count on God because He does not become someone different, not even by a little. **"I the Lord do not change. So you, O descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed."** (Malachi 3: 6 NIV) Of Jesus, the Bible notes, **Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.** (Hebrews 13: 8 NIV)

John reminds us that Jesus, the "Word", does not change and you can count on Him to be just exactly who He was before He created the universe, as He was when you first met Him and he will be that way too when you enter your eternal home. Jesus will always hate sins and His love for you never diminishes. Jesus Christ is, to use the technical term, immutable. His personality, His character and His conscience never is altered by time, circumstances or who is with Him. You on the other hand are like a river flowing into the sea. You are never the same from moment to moment. You are always in a state of flux. Who you are is not who you will be next week or in ten thousand years. This too is pointed out by John in a subtle way. Notice that John reminds you that he and the other disciples and followers of Jesus saw Him, watched Him, heard what He had to say and even literally touched Him. Remember John's early encounter with Jesus? He was with his brother James about to go fishing when Jesus approached them. **Going on from there, he**

saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him. (Matthew 4: 21-22 NIV)

Do you see what happened as soon as John and his brother came into contact with Jesus? They changed and changed dramatically. The obvious surface alteration was in how they were spending their days. Before they were fisherman and almost immediately after touching, hearing, and seeing Jesus, they became His followers and left behind the fishing business. Something so abrupt, so transformative in lifestyle is rarely, if ever taken lightly. It might be made decisively but not flippantly. No one becomes a true Christian without thought and more importantly, without coming upon Jesus. And that does not happen by one's own effort. It only occurs if the Lord reveals Himself to you. **"All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows who the Son is except the Father, and no one knows who the Father is except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."** (Luke 10:22 NIV) The term translated "knows" implies intimate knowledge, the knowing of someone well. You might know about Jesus or have some ideas about the Father and not receive direct revelation from Jesus Christ, but you will not have any sort of relationship with Him that brings you real understanding of God and His ways unless Christ comes to you.

Once Christ reveals Himself to you, you become much more than the sum of your experiences and genetic composition. This is how it happens. Jesus says this to you. **Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.** (Revelation 3: 20 NIV) Notice two points here. It starts, this change in you, with Jesus revealing Himself to you. He stands at the door and knocks and somehow speaks to you. If you open the way for Christ to come be with you, He will build a new life in you; reveal Himself to you. It is on Him to show Himself to you and it is on you to let Him join your life. I can tell you everything I know about Christ and His ways, but it will never change your life unless Christ reveals Himself to you. And then, that revelation is of no use to you if you do not open the way for Christ to join you. When He comes to you, and you invite Jesus Christ to be the center of your life, a supernatural transformation occurs that makes you completely new. It is what Jesus called being "born again".

Being born again simply means that because you have put your hope in Jesus Christ for salvation, for the removal of your sins and eternal life, you become someone new, Christ and you together forming a completely new personality. As a result, you have the power to do anything Christ wants you to do. Any change He chooses for you is possible. Any reworking of your habits, behaviors or even thinking can happen because you have all the strength and power of God within you. Listen to this. **You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.** (Romans 8: 9 NIV) And consider this. **No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.** (Romans 8: 37 NIV) Any change God wants you to make, you can do it because Christ lives in you. You are not limited by your genes, your past experience or by your weaknesses. You have the power of Christ living in you and you are now built to conquer, to overcome, to rise. **To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.** (Colossians 1:27 NIV) You are now made for glory, for honor. Shame is no longer your destiny. My prayer is that today, you live with complete reliance on Christ to make you perfect in every way.