

The Change God Wants

Several recent events have brought the issue of change of sexual orientation to newspaper headlines, TV news programs and talk shows all over the world. People have taken different views on the issue, some claiming that God accepts us only if we change our bad behavior and replace it with behavior that is acceptable to Him; others claiming that God, being love, accepts us all just the way we are; therefore, there is no need to change any behavior whatsoever in order to be accepted by God.

Some call this a clash between law and grace. This clash between *law and grace* is not new; Paul wrote a letter to the Galatians precisely because of this problem, which was threatening to divide the Church at that time.

It is timely to ask the question – what is the change that God wants from us? Does God want us to change our behavior before He accepts us? What about after He accepts us?

Most people, when using the word *change* in the context of same sex attraction and practices, refer to change of sexual attractions and behavior - the focus being placed on the change of one's sexual behavior through effort on their part.

Does God really accept us only when we change bad behavior into good behavior?

In the Old Testament Scriptures to the Israelites, God recorded the covenant that He made with them. The essence of this covenant was that God would make the Israelites His people, and He would be their God, provided they kept His law. This meant that they had to change and adapt their behavior in order to measure up to the standards established by God through the law.

What did God's law require? Absolute perfection. Absolute sinlessness. Total purity, holiness and sanctity. The law basically says, "You will be accepted by God only when you are exactly like Him. One single flaw and you are disqualified." The standards are absolutely high. The law essentially demands that we be perfect as God is perfect. That means never having any flaw whatsoever.

Did the Israelites satisfy this requirement? No. Could any of us meet this requirement? No.

Does changing any external behavior, sexual or non-sexual, help us in becoming qualified – total perfection? No, it cannot. Regardless of how positive and even necessary a change of behavior might be, no change will ever be able to bring us back to that perfection, purity and holiness required by a Perfect, Pure and Holy God.

The Scriptures show that God knew this and that the covenant with the Israelites was one part of God's plan to lead us to what He really wants – it prepared us to understand what can and what can't solve our dilemma and prepare us to receive the real solution to our dilemma.

What does God want from us? God created us for... marriage to Him. Interestingly, the Bible begins with a wedding, it ends with a wedding, and in between is a love

story, a divine romance. Scripture calls Jesus the groom and the church the bride. God created us so that He could be one with us. In this, we are faced with a dilemma; how do imperfect people become one with a perfect God?

We cannot recreate the original godly nature that Adam and Eve had – it is simply impossible. When we try, we come under the law of the covenant and we fail. There is nothing we can do: having been made to know God, to be one with Him, we are now kept from experiencing our divine destiny because of something that happened to us even before we were born physically! We can't do anything to change this dilemma or to solve it.

But God can. And He has already done it!

God must change sinners into saints before He can become one with them. This can only be done through the complete work of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. In order to make us His dwelling place, God had to literally recreate us in such a way that we would have the same nature He has, so that He could pour Himself into us, becoming one with us, so that we might grow, become spiritually mature, and get to know Him completely.

How did He do that?

Through Jesus' death and resurrection. Jesus' blood provides forgiveness, which is absolutely essential for us to be made right with God, for our sins separated us from God. However, we need more than the forgiveness of sin to be right with God.

We must have life! And the life we need is provided by the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ! It is through our identification - becoming one with Christ - that the great exchange takes place - our sin for his righteousness - and whereby we receive His very LIFE as our life. And along with life comes a new identity: saints, beloved children of God, having His very nature. In Christ we have the same nature He has - no longer sinners, but saints.

God does not accept sinners; He does not accept us as we are in our natural state; instead, He identifies us with Jesus on the cross, makes us one with Him, and by doing so, buries forever our old sinful nature, and turns us into saints by giving us His very own nature, and only then receives us as His beloved sons and daughters, because now we have Jesus as our life, as our spiritual DNA. With the new birth, this new identity of beloved children is given to us - not as a result of any change of behavior or performance on our part - but as a result of Jesus' perfect performance on our behalf.

In other words, God does not demand that we change our behavior – He changes our nature, our identity - by giving us His very nature and identity!

This brings a very important focus to this reflection: the central issue that we are facing is not simply a matter of change of external behavior - it is the issue of change of identity - not what we do, but who we are! The problem of humanity is not behavioral. It is not what we do - it is what/who we are - our identity. Ever since the fall of man in the Garden of Eden, people have been searching for identity in

opening doors

all kinds of places and endeavors - good and bad - without success.

What do people who are not yet God's children need to do to be accepted by God? Change their behavior, their sexual orientation or numerous other changes? No, they must experience change in their spiritual orientation; they must receive a new identity! God gives us a new identity in Christ.

In accepting our new identity as sons and daughters of the living God, what happens to the sinner I once was? Do I become a "forgiven sinner"? If that is all God has done, than we're in dire straits indeed: called to be saints, but having the nature of a sinner. We'd be cursed to work very hard all our lives without ever having any hope of reaching the goal we're striving for. That would be nothing less than sheer torture and torment. No wonder so many who think this become exhausted, especially those with same sex attraction issues – they can't take it anymore. And so they either give up their faith or they try to merge faith with sin in what Dietrich Bonhoeffer called "cheap grace". No, I become a saint with a new nature. A saint who is dead to sin and alive to Christ.

What about people who are God's children? What does God want from those who are now alive in Christ?

Does God want a change of behavior? Although change of behavior is not bad in itself. God wants something far better for us: God wants us to grow! Growth is the only way we can resume the exciting adventure for which we were originally created: to get to know God, and to know Him completely! A non-literal translation of Colossians 3:9-10 basically says this: "And this new person, is the new man that God is constantly renewing, so that he may become more and more like Him, so that he may know God completely." The idea in this passage is that God is making us grow, so that we may know him completely – and that is the purpose of our existence, as stated by Jesus when He prayed for us in John 17.

As we get to know God, several important things take place: First, we find out why we exist. The purpose of our existence is to get to know God. Second, as we get to know Him, we discover who we are, for our true nature is hidden in God. Third, as we grow into knowing God, we start reflecting who He is in our external behavior. This naturally flows out of growing in grace.

As we grow in grace, mature and become spiritual adults, we leave behind childish things and experience more excellent things: we begin to think, feel and to behave like our Heavenly Father and our older brother, Jesus.

What does this mean for same-sex attractions and

relationships? What is the change that God wants – and requires – from people with same-sex attractions so that He can once again become one with us? The change God demands is the same as for any other person. First a supernatural change of heart, of nature, of identity. Then He becomes one with us, and sets us free so that we can grow in Christ. As we grow, we get to know more and more who God is, and thereby who we are. The new creation that we are in Christ includes a deeply transformed life that involves significant change. Our relationships must change. We must live by the Spirit and not practice sexual immorality; including homosexual relationships, incest, adultery and fornication. Our awareness changes: the awareness that we in our distinct genders are a gift to our fellow humanity, and the willingness to grow into mature expressions of that gift. Jesus enables us to resume the journey toward loving others well, and sustains us upon it.

The goals of God for us are sanctification and Christlikeness. This may or may not involve changes in sexual attractions – for either same-sex attracted people or opposite-sex attracted people. This must include becoming aware that we, in our distinct genders, are a gift to our fellow humanity, and becoming willing to grow into mature expressions of that gift. Jesus enables us to resume the journey toward loving others well, and sustains us upon it.

Whether a person marries someone of the opposite gender or lives as a single person dedicated for Christ, Jesus is in all and through all. He is the Source of transformation. He invites and enables us to live honest, humble, and generous lives. That means being authentic with others about our temptations, weaknesses and struggles. It also means being disciplined about tending to the needs for love that remain in us. At the same time, we seek Jesus to strengthen our love for others because they are worthy of love. In that way, we exercise the new creation that we are and we grow into maturity.

What is our role or part in this process? It is to believe Jesus. To receive his complete work for us and in us as a gift – receive it, rejoice in it, and release it to others. This is the purpose of our existence, and the fulfillment of Jesus' words: "I came that you may have life, and life abundantly."

We started with the question, "What is the change God wants from us?" We've said it is a change in our spiritual orientation; a change that God creates in us. Now we conclude with an encouragement to you. If you don't know Christ, invite Him into your life. If you do know Christ, welcome and embrace the total transformation that God seeks to create in you.

This article is derived from a longer article by Willy Torresin de Oliveira entitled [After All, What Is The Change That God Wants From Us?](#)

What Can I Do?

Pray. God works through Exodus Global Alliance when you pray. Pray that we will be effective in proclaiming that God has good news for people who experience same-sex attractions and for people involved in homosexuality. Pray that we will be effective in equipping churches to minister God's truth and grace to people impacted by homosexuality.

Give. Exodus' ministry to people depends on your financial support. Our support comes from individual donors, not institutions, company sponsors or government grants. Will you give as God directs you? Send your gift using an Exodus response card or contact the Exodus Global Alliance office.

Invite Us to Your Church. Exodus welcomes invitations to speak in churches—sharing how the Gospel is good news to people impacted by homosexuality, sharing testimonies of God's transformation and discussing how the church can minister God's truth and grace. We would love to receive an invitation from your church. You can take the first step by contacting us to say you would like us to speak in your church. We'll take the next step of contacting your pastor.