

Change Within The Soul

Ephesians 3:8-13

8 To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, 9 and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, 10 so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. 11 This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, 12 in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him. 13 So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory. (Ephesians 3:8-13)

For most of my life, I have struggled with this matter that the Apostle Paul brings to us here in these words, that of “humility”. And may I give this word a further defining focus by calling it “humility of the soul”!

I struggle because my personality does not naturally lend itself towards humility. I am instead naturally presumptuous with arrogance always lurking only one step away. Described by some as a “Type A” personality, my mind and my soul are constantly striving within me, seldom ever “resting”, always reaching for the next thing to do or to accomplish.

Corporate bosses usually like that sort of personality within their workers, especially their leaders. But again, as I said a moment ago, for the person themselves, for myself, it presents itself as a continuous struggle and drive and even turmoil that brews and foments within my mind and especially within my soul.

Simply put, living with my kind of personality is never an “easy” or “comfortable” condition.

May I add that we should not be confused by the outward appearance of this sort of personality, because it can present itself in many ways! It is sometimes outward and presumptuous, as with my own, but at other times it can be cloaked within an “inward aggression”, a personality that today’s psychologists call, “passive aggressive”. But however it presents itself, it is, at its essence “broken” and in need of help.

In contrast to my Type A personality is the Type B personality? And I will give you the simplest definition as given in my Wikipedia Dictionary. There we read . . .

“People with Type B personalities generally live at a lower stress level and typically work steadily, enjoying achievement but not becoming stressed when

they do not achieve. When faced with competition, they do not mind losing and either enjoy the game or back down. They may be creative and enjoy exploring ideas and concepts. They are often reflective, thinking about the outer and inner worlds.”

This definition of the Type B personality seems “blissfully” calm and serene to me! But may I also say, somewhat “tongue-in-cheek” that this definition may have been written by a frustrated Type A personality who wishes he or she could have such a blissful existence. And in reality, this kind of personality may not really exist, those Type B people probably just hide the real truth that is going on within their souls. Again, my words are tongue-in-cheek.

But why am I bringing these personality comparisons to us today? It is because, within the person of the Apostle Paul, we are presented with what appears to be the epitome of a Type A personality. And in all that we read about him in the earlier days of his life, he truly was, presumptuous, arrogant, demanding and continually driven to carry out the beliefs and philosophies that he held as being right.

And the more power and authority that was given to him, the worse he became, bringing to mind the modern saying, “power corrupts, absolute power corrupts absolutely”.

Paul assumed himself to be right in his beliefs and he went about with all diligence carrying forward the response that he believed to be appropriate, imprisoning and even killing many who had placed their faith in Christ.

What I am describing for us here today is “arrogant pride”, the belief that “I am right”, “absolutely right”. And further, if you or anyone else stands in my way, I will walk right over you.

Now then, contrast that condition of soul with the condition of soul that developed within the Apostle Paul later in his life, after he had placed his own faith in Christ and had received the Holy Spirit himself. Verse 8 gives us a simple look. Listen!

8 To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, (Ephesians 3:8)

And verse 13,

13 So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory. (Ephesians 3:13)

The arrogance and self-pride that once so strongly controlled the life and behavior of the Apostle Paul now seems gone, replaced by a “deep abiding sense of humility”.

Thinking here about the Apostle Paul, I am reminded of the words to the hymn “At Calvary” . . .

“Years I spent in vanity and pride,
Caring not my Lord was crucified,
Knowing not it was for me He died
On Calvary.”

From what we read here in these scriptures, we know that the words of this hymn fit Paul’s personality very well. He had been brought up in an “upscale” lifestyle, classically trained in the scriptures by some of the best rabbinical authorities, calling himself a “Pharisee of the Pharisees”. He learned well and he firmly believed all that he had been taught, so much so that he was willing to kill anyone who defied what he believed to be the “laws of God”.

And so yes, as the words of the hymn refrain, “Years I spent in vanity and pride, Caring not my Lord was crucified, Knowing not it was for me He died On Calvary.”

Whether Paul was actually present at the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus is not known, but most likely he was not. And by his early behavior of hunting down and persecuting those who followed after Christ, we can know that even with all of his extensive training in the best rabbinical schools, he knew nothing of the real plan of God.

But thanks be to God, Paul did later come to understand God’s purposes in the crucifixion of Christ. And he later wrote at length about its absolute necessity for the salvation of men’s souls. In 1 Corinthians 2, we read

2 For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. (1 Corinthians 2:2)

What was it that brought about this change within his soul? What was it that took place that brought Paul from where he was in those earliest years, “years spent in vanity and pride, caring not his Lord was crucified, knowing not it was for him that Christ had died On Calvary?”

The change began on a very special day as Paul was on his way to Damascus to persecute even more of the people who had turned their hearts to Christ. And from the beginning, God was not gentle with Paul in bringing about the change, knocking him to the ground and blinding him.

But more than that, change took place on the inside, deep within Paul's soul, changes that can only take place by the personal hand of God, changes like those spoken about in Ezekiel 36, where God says,

26 And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. (Ezekiel 36:26-27)

And listen to these words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 2 as he humbly describes the work of the Holy Spirit within him.

1 And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. 2 For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. 3 And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, 4 and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. 6 Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. 7 But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. 8 None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. 9 But, as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him"— 10 these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. (1Corinthians 2:1-10)

Spiritual changes can never take place within the souls of men solely by a person's own effort. Belief that we can somehow altar that which is natural within us, our personality and our learned behavior, has been a fallacy that has led many astray for a millennia.

Real effectual change for the good is simply not possible solely through human effort.

And it is not even possible when we add in such efforts as counseling and therapy and medication. Changes within the soul, good changes, must come from a whole other source. It must come through the Spirit of God, and no other way.

For the Apostle Paul to go from being a man that was filled with arrogance and pride, caring not His Lord was crucified, knowing not it was for him that Christ died, to becoming the humble man that we read about here in these words, is humility at its

best, the complete opposite of the arrogance and pride that ruled Paul's life before he surrendered himself to Christ.

This is change, "real change within the soul"!

Did this change remove the human personality that God had born into Paul, his Type A personality? Not really! Why? It is because a Type A personality in the hands of a wise God can be an extremely useful and beneficial tool. God simply added His Holy Spirit into the spirit and personality of Paul, transforming and conforming it from its arrogance and corruption into the holiness of Christ, making it a useful vessel for God's purposes. And Paul was changed, forever.

But may I take a moment and remind us to always be on guard, our old sinful "self" and sinful ways will always try to resurrect themselves, tempting us to go back into that "wilderness" from whence we came!

And that was so with the Apostle Paul. We can read about some of the battles that sometimes raged within his soul in Romans chapter 7. There, he said in verse 15 . . .

15 For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. (Romans 7:15)

But is this not the exact nature of sin. Recall the words of God in Genesis 4 just before Cain went out to kill his brother Abel. There . . .

6 The LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? 7 If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it." (Genesis 4:6-7)

Sin is our most present enemy, a natural predator that continually desires to "have" and to control us. And if the sins of arrogance and pride are our natural personality traits, then they are a handy weapon in the hands of sin and satan. And they will surely "resurrect" themselves whenever we allow them access to our soul. So, we must always be on our guard.

But again, as we mentioned earlier, a Type A personality in the hands of a wise God can be an extremely useful and beneficial tool for His purposes. One of the things that is typical within the Type A personality is that they are always "doers". Paul's fervency did not stop when he became saved. It just changed directions, into a Christ-centered ministry. Listen!

8 To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, 9 and to bring to light

for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, 10 so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. 11 This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, 12 in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him. 13 So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory. (Ephesians 3:8-13)

Paul was always a powerful force to be reckoned with. And once God changed His soul, he became a powerful force for the salvation of untold numbers of souls into God's kingdom.

And here, Paul even encourages His brethren to not lose heart or feel sorry for him as he suffered for the gospel. He was humbly willing to suffer for the purposes of God.

Folks, this is what takes place within a person's soul when God's Holy Spirit comes to live within it. God changes it from its broken and corrupt ways into a vessel fit for His Holy plans and purposes. Arrogance and pride turn to humility, service and sacrifice.

May I ask you, have you taken time to examine your own soul? More than that, have you humbly gotten down on your knees and ask the Spirit of God to examine your soul.

Most likely you are much like me and Paul and every other person you know. You might not even know whether you are a Type A or a Type B personality. You may be outwardly pushy or inwardly defiant. But whatever your personality, though it may manifest itself differently within your soul, you are nonetheless prideful and arrogant, always believing yourself to be "right". It is the nature of the human soul.

But please listen . . . your soul can be changed. And it must be changed, or else you will never see the kingdom of God, neither in this life nor in the life to come.

May I plead with you to humble yourself and to get down on your knees and ask God to do within your soul what He did within Paul's soul, and to not hold back. Your whole eternity depends upon it.

May I close by reading the words of the Hymn "At Calvary"? And may I plead with you to think about your own soul as you hear these words!

Years I spent in vanity and pride,
Caring not my Lord was crucified,
Knowing not it was for me He died
On Calvary.

By God's Word at last my sin I learned;
Then I trembled at the law I'd spurned,
Till my guilty soul imploring turned
To Calvary.

Now I've giv'n to Jesus everything,
Now I gladly own Him as my King,
Now my raptured soul can only sing
Of Calvary!

Oh, the love that drew salvation's plan!
Oh, the grace that brought it down to man!
Oh, the mighty gulf that God did span
At Calvary!

Mercy there was great, and grace was free;
Pardon there was multiplied to me;
There my burdened soul found liberty
At Calvary