

The Good and Beautiful God

Remainder of Chapter 1 - How We Change

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Summary

Jesus offers a new life, one that is full. One that is close to our intimate Father and all that entails. Stepping into the Family is the beginning, but we begin a long walk of realization, of His progressively showing us the things in us that interfere with this close relationship He intends for us to have with our Holy Father. This requires change in us, not on the surface but at the 'heart' level. But how? Who can change one's 'heart'? The answer is God alone, and this chapter explains the mechanics of who we are and how we might cooperate with God, find true change, and begin actively growing closer to the One Who loves us best.

Key points

Prelude God mercifully explains to us what mankind has strived to understand for millennia - how are we made? What makes us tick? Why do we do the things we do? And Who better to explain, than the One Who made us?

A multitude of philosophies and approaches have developed through our history on the topic of our behavior and how to see it change. Questions have to be answered concerning how we work before anything can be said of how to bring about change. Consider the options: Are people innately 'good' or 'bad' on the inside? Are we solely responsible, or can 'the Devil make me do it'? Is change a matter of shaping habit and behavior alone? Does God change and grow us, regardless of our participation (or lack thereof)? Our Creator provides us with answers to these questions in His Word to us, his children.

Tossed about the sea of these questions, life can be miserable - especially to the person who is aware of his faults, the outcomes of his behavior, and the need to change.

Misunderstanding how we are made leads to ineffective attempts to change - and the misery of desperation, perhaps even disenchantment with God. To be stuck in an awareness of need - and a longing need for help and answers - leaves one with a miserable resignation to a sad existence. But it doesn't need to be this way, if we will follow our Lord's instruction and position ourselves to receive His help.

The Mechanics of the Human 'Heart' Jesus stated that "what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart" (Matt 15.18a). The 'heart' is described as responsible as the seat of who we are, and what God is primarily concerned about in us. Consider that a search for the word 'heart' through the Bible produces 862 instances. A few that are relevant to Father's concern of our heart condition include:

(Before the Flood) Gen 6.5 "The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his **heart** was only

evil continually.”

(To the king

Abimelech on not taking Sarah into his bed when warned by God) Gen 20.6a “Then God said to him in the dream, “Yes, I know that you have done this in the integrity of your **heart**”

(Given from God

by Moses to the Hebrews) Deut 10.12-13 “And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love Him, to serve the Lord your God with all your **heart** and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments and statutes of the Lord, which I am commanding you today for your good?”

(Jonathan’s

armor bearer responds to attack the garrison) 1 Sam 14.7 “And his armor-bearer said to him, “Do all that is in your **heart**. Do as you wish. Behold, I am with you **heart** and soul.”

(David’s plea) Psa 139.23 “Search me, O God, and know my **heart**! Try me and know my thoughts!”

(God states) Jer 17.10 “I the Lord search the **heart** and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds.”

And, (Concerning

Father’s Work through the Spirit) Rom

8.27 “And He who searches **hearts** knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the Will of God.”

Father calls the root of our person the ‘heart’, and shows much attention to it. Perhaps the clearest passage attesting to this is 2 Chron 16.9a, “For the eyes

of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to give strong support to those whose **heart** is blameless toward Him.”

The ‘Will’ and its role in our behavior What role do we think our ‘Will’ plays in our behavior? Without God’s explanation of our heart, it would be easy to assume that our Will is responsible for our actions. Consider the terms ‘Will power’, or ‘setting your Will’ to do something, or the ‘Will is weak’. These terms seem to indicate that our Will alone is responsible, but in consideration of the vast passages of the heart, it cannot be held responsible.

Bending our Will to bring about change results in a short-lived outcome. Yes, we can do pretty much anything for a while - some of us more so than others depending on the circumstance - but in the end, we all eventually come back to show our true colors, or the reality of our state of heart.

Our book’s author suggests that the Will is ‘the hinge on which decision is made’, ‘responding to the impulses’ of the things that influence it. Maybe a good description, but can we add that the Will - while it can be strained for a while to affect behavior - is really the outward-facing outcome we see as a result of the heart behind it?

Isa 50.7 states “But the Lord God helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced; therefore I have **set my face like a flint**, and I know that I shall not be put to shame.”

Using the Will to support a behavior and hold it in place for the time being isn’t a bad thing. Isaiah has a courageous heart that rests in God’s help, and he sets his Will as a flint to assist in his intent - but it is not the seat of his intent.

Influencers of the Will - what drives our behavior Our author writes that the Will instead responds to 3 primary, underlying influences: The

Mind, the Body, and the Social Context.

These three things are all warped by our fallenness, the result of the sin of us and in the world. Mind, Body and Social Context are all creations of God, and were perfect when created. The introduction of sin warped these things, and we now respond accordingly.

Jesus, too, possesses these three things. In His sinless case, however, they remain as the 'Manufacturer' intended - and so is the outcome of His actions. Jesus' Saving Work is the basis for seeing these things redeemed back to their correct intent, and thus we can grow into an increasingly closer awareness of God, and have a full life - "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly." (John 10.10b)

Jesus' goal is that all three things in each follower would be brought to heel, to increasingly be repaired and changed, back to the way Father intended. This change is a cooperative act of each believer responding to the initiating Grace of God, Who states He wants us to repent and return to our original purpose of seeing, trusting, valuing and Worshipping Him.

Understanding the cooperative nature of change is important. God does not change us without our participation, and we cannot change ourselves without God's Work of Grace. He alone has the means to change the heart of a cooperating believer of Christ.

Specifically, **the Mind**

relates to our worldview, our beliefs, our attitudes that drive our responses. Our part is to hear his Word and embrace the challenges to our differing perceptions, then to repent.

God's Grace = Giving of the Truth, His promise to help us gain wisdom. "If any of you

lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him." James 1.5

Our cooperation = Read, strive to understand, work to recognize the use of the Word. "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." Rom 12.2

The Body - be it the flesh, emotions, desires - influences our decisions, often towards the wrong conclusions. Aside from the basic 'sins of the flesh' are pain-avoiding and pleasure-seeking influencers as we seek shortcuts to a false peace, and thus play out through the Will - Prov 30.7-9 "Two things I ask of You; deny them not to me before I die: Remove far from me falsehood and lying; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me, lest I be full and deny You and say, "Who is the Lord?" or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God.", and, Prov 7.21-22 "With much seductive speech she persuades him; with her smooth talk she compels him. All at once he follows her, as an ox goes to the slaughter, or as a stag is caught fast"

God's Grace = Jesus' instruction (command) on choosing Him over ourselves - "And He said to all, "If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it." Lk 9.23-24

Our cooperation = Choose to know Christ as superior to all other things - "Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For His sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not

having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ” Phil 3.8-9

Social Context - We are in large part a product of our nurture, the outcome of the way

we were raised, that we live, and what people and their ideas - contrary to Father’s - that we embrace - Tim 1.3-4 “As I urged

you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith.”, and, 2

John 6-7 “And this is love, that we walk according to his commandments; this is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, so that you should walk in it. For many deceivers have gone

out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist.”, and, 1 Cor 15.33 “Do not be deceived: “Bad company ruins good morals.””

God’s Grace = A command that we separate from influences that we hold more dear than God; that falsely inform us - “Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me” Matt 10.37, and, “Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm.” Prov 13.20

Our cooperation = Choose friendship with godly influencers who also fear and pursue God - “As soon as he had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was

knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.” 1 Sam 18.1, and, “A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.” Prov 17.17,

and including Jesus, “No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you.” John 15.15

Father cares greatly about our Heart, because it is the seat of who we are. He seeks those after His own heart (David, per 1 Sam 13.14a). Our closeness to Him is in direct proportion to our holiness. Yes, we are forgiven and can stand before Him on Christ's Work. But consider a life of seeing Him now through an active cooperation of knowing his Word, repenting and being changed, and expecting to see Him. "Whoever has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him." John 14.21