

What Changed?

What changed? He's not the same person he was before. He talks differently. He acts differently. His priorities have changed. His attitude has changed. He has new friends, new co-workers, new associates. He used to be a Pharisee. Now he's an apostle. He used to hunt Christians down. Now he's one of them. He's even writing letters to churches across the Roman world. What changed?

Everything changed for Saul in an instant. You probably remember the story. On the road to Damascus. He was on the hunt for Christians. Then a bright light. The voice of Jesus calling out from that light. "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" He was blind for three days. His sight was restored. He was baptized. He became a Christian. He even went by a new name, Paul. His life was no longer the same. He was a new man. He was living a new life. Not a life by the flesh, but a life by the Spirit. That change was evident.

The Spirit changes people. Paul wanted his Galatian readers to realize that too. The same change that occurred in Paul also occurred in them too. Their lives were completely different now. They didn't have the same conversion story that Paul had. But the change that occurred in them was just as real. It was just as amazing. It was just as miraculous. What changed? Everything changed.

That change occurred in you too. Just as real. Just as amazing. Just as miraculous. Most of you probably don't even remember it. It happened when you were a baby. Your parents brought you up. A pastor poured water over your head. He baptized you. Everything changed from that moment. Your life was no longer the same.

Everything changes when the Spirit brings someone to faith. Unbelief changes into saving faith. We can't see that change, but that change is very real. Another change occurs too. This is one that we can see. We can see it because the difference couldn't be any more evident. Life by the Spirit consists in the fruit of the Spirit. Paul lists them out: Love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. The life of a believer produces these fruits.

But how evident is that change? Let's examine our own lives. What really changed in how we act, speak, and think? Paul has another list. He calls them the acts of the flesh. I'm not going to list them all off, but they are the opposites of those fruits of the Spirit. They are the sinful attitudes of our hearts. The sinful thoughts of our minds. The sinful words that come from our mouths. The sinful actions of our flesh.

What changed? When we look at our lives. Our thoughts, our words, our actions, our feelings in our hearts. I think we see a lot more acts of the flesh than fruits of the Spirit. These aren't just one-off moments too. That would be bad enough. They occur daily. Daily sins. Daily

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falling short. Daily selfishness. Daily jealousy and envy of those who have what we wish could have. Daily idolatry of ourselves or other people or things. Daily anger and frustration with the people in our lives. Daily giving in to sinful desires: Lustful glances, actions. Maybe even sexual behavior or actions which we now regret.

There's more too. Selfish comparison with others. Love for money. Coarse and foul things spewing out of our mouths. Making excuses for times that we drank too much. Saying hurtful things to our spouses, children, parents, siblings, friends, or strangers who we encounter on bad days. Hurtful, maybe hateful things we think or say about other groups of people. Disrespect for those God has placed in authority over us.

What changed? In the battle against the flesh, the flesh seems to win more often than not. Sometimes we fight back. Other times we don't. Sometimes we don't even think about what we say or do. It just happens. All these acts of the flesh that Paul listed apply to us in some way, shape, or form. What changed? It doesn't look like anything has changed in us. Maybe we're not living by the Spirit at all. Maybe our baptism has been nullified by our sins. Maybe we're not really Christians. Maybe we stand before God as condemned.

What changed? Paul actually asked the Galatians that same question. But not for the same reason we might think. There was a problem among the Galatian Christians. It wasn't that their fruits of the faith were as evident as they should have been. The problem was that there were those teaching a Gospel other than Christ crucified. They were teaching a reliance on the works of the Law. A reliance on ceremonial acts that were no longer necessary. Salvation by Christ and works.

Paul passionately pointed these Galatians back to the only source of their salvation: Not themselves, but Jesus. What changed? Everything changed. Jesus changed everything. Not by giving us a new list of rules to follow or guidelines that we needed to live by. But by taking on human flesh. By living on our behalf. Fulfilling the requirements of the Law that we were unable to fulfill. Resisting the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil. Perfectly loving and serving the people he ministered to.

What changed? Everything changed. Jesus changed everything. Jesus changed everything by becoming what he wasn't. He became our sins and our guilt, our acts of the flesh which testify against us. Every sinful thought, word, and action. Every failure to resist our sinful nature. Every careless, accidental, and deliberate sin we ever committed. Jesus became that. These sins were not inconsequential. God didn't look the other way. He didn't just say, "Accidents happen and move on." No, Jesus suffered the consequences for them. He was nailed to a cross for them. He suffered the punishment that they deserved.

What changed? Everything changed. Jesus changed everything. Jesus changed everything by rising from the dead. The punishment was suffered. The price was paid. Our salvation and the

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forgiveness of all sins was guaranteed. This is where Paul pointed the Galatian Christians back to. Back to the crucified and resurrected Jesus. This is where Paul points us to look too: Away from ourselves, and solely to Jesus.

What changed? Everything changed. Baptism changed everything. You didn't feel the change. You didn't see the change. You probably don't even remember anything from that day. But it most certainly happened. You were crucified with Christ. You were buried with Christ. You were raised with Christ. You were clothed with Christ. That's how Baptism changed you. The old self which lived by the flesh died. The new man or new woman who lives by the Spirit was born.

Paul says it so well in Galatians 2: **"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me."** What changed? Everything changed. We are no longer of the flesh, but of the Spirit. Your baptism is the proof. Christ crucified and resurrected is the proof.

What changed? Everything changed. Now we get to show that. The fruits of the Spirit are not new rules for us to follow. They are an encouragement for us to live as the new people God has made us. They are the attitudes and actions which Christians naturally want to show. They are the attitudes and actions which reflect our gratitude to Jesus who saved us.

Living by the Spirit means fighting against the old flesh. In this world, it still has power and influence. It still can make faithful and saved Christians, you and me, stumble and sin. Living by the Spirit means crucifying the flesh daily. Being refreshed by the real forgiveness that we have in Jesus. It means battling the flesh and overcoming it, not on our own, but with the Spirit's help. It means living as the new people that God has made you. What changed? Everything changed. Let your words, thoughts, and actions reflect that change. Amen.