

Talk Notes

Title: Change from the Inside Out.

Meeting: Freshwaters

Date: 11th September 2016

Introduction

Do you believe that the Christian life is all about keeping rules? Or perhaps you believe that Christianity is all about what you believe and has nothing to do with the way that you live?

In actual fact neither is accurate because the Christian walk is all to do with our relationship with Jesus and the sort of people we become as we are changed into His likeness.

Rules about outside, does not change inside

I must admit – I lean more naturally towards being a rule-keeper – there is nothing I like more than a good rule – you see rules are nice and simple, it's purely a matter of choice to be obedient or disobedient and somehow we feel that if we are obedient everything will be alright. We might also feel just a little bit superior to those who are being disobedient.

There are a number of problems with using rules to govern our lives – can anyone let me know what some of those problems are?

- Rules are external – they deal with outward behaviour not with who we are on the inside – and God looks at the heart! (**1 Sam 16:7**)
- Following rules abdicates our responsibility to discern and decide. Many circumstances in life are nuanced not black and white. We need to discern what is really happening and make a decision about the right course of action with the assistance of the Holy Spirit. Just blindly following rules does not allow for this.
- Rules can diminish our relationship with God – This was the problem with the Scribes and Pharisees, they followed the law God had given as well as many other rules they created around them – if any gap was spotted it was quickly filled with another rule. **You can follow rules without asking God, listening to God – or even knowing God.**
- The purpose of the law was to reveal sin, not to make us right (**Rom 3:19**)

The nature of sin

Notice, the law reveals sin – sin is not just law-breaking, it is more fundamental and serious than that – **sin is living at variance with God's nature and will.** Where this involves a deliberate choice – that is we know what God's will is and we choose to do something

different – this is rebellion. However we can sin even when we don't make a deliberate choice to disobey God – either because we don't know God and or we don't know His will.

The Old Testament often uses the word 'Chata' for sin – it means to miss the mark (as someone who fires at a target and misses it) – the New Testament often uses 'Parabasis' which means to step over the line. We can, and in fact all do, live lives that miss the mark, or exhibit behaviour which 'crosses the line', whether or not we know it is God who has set the target or drawn the line.

The fundamental and most significance consequence of sin is the break in relationship with God that it causes – it was this broken relationship that Jesus came to mend – **He saved us not from disobedience to the law but from separation from God** – salvation is much more about enabling a relationship with God than about whether we go to heaven or hell. If we see salvation only in those terms we miss the whole point – if we feel we are saved from Hell, we may even be fooled into **not** developing a real relationship with God and so missing the whole point of salvation.

Changing into His likeness

So we have recognised that following rules has only a limited effect and even that just on the outside and that sin is not breaking the law it is living at variance with God's nature and will which leads to a break in relationship – so what is the answer?

Romans 2:29 No, a true Jew is one whose heart is right with God. And true circumcision is not merely obeying the letter of the law; rather, it is a change of heart produced by God's Spirit. And a person with a changed heart seeks praise from God, not from people.

From this passage it is clear that we are made right with God not by rituals like circumcision, not by rule keeping but by our hearts being changed by the Holy Spirit.

2 Corinthians 3:1-18

As we turn to Christ the veil of separation is removed, we are able to look upon and reflect God's glory and the Holy Spirit begins to change us into His likeness.

Our aim should not be to try our hardest to keep the law, **instead we should cooperate with the Holy Spirit so that we become the type of people who fulfil the law** because it is as natural to us as it was to Christ.

The first few verses of 2 Cor 3 puts it in terms of a new covenant or agreement with God as a letter written on our hearts rather than laws written on tablets of stone – **Ezek 11:19** using the NIV gives us a great image of this, **'I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh'**.

Hearts of stone live by the laws etched upon it, hearts of flesh live by the letter of love written on them by the Spirit of God. Both will elicit a degree of change in behaviour, the first from the outside in and the latter from the inside out. The first can only penetrate so far and can lead to pride and superiority, while the latter changes us into God's likeness in all humility and truth.

Behold I stand at the door and knock

Rev 3:20 is a well know verse - **Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal together as friends** – a picture of openness and intimacy.

We often recognise this as a picture of salvation – people opening their lives to Jesus for the first time. Although I think this can be used in this way, the actual context concerns those who are already followers of Christ, encouraging them to respond to God's loving discipline, and change.

If we look at this verse from the perspective of those who have already let Christ into their lives, then it highlights that there is more than one door before which Jesus stands and knocks.

Using the illustration of a home, turning to Christ and accepting Him into our lives for the first time is like opening the front door – Jesus comes in, He shares a meal with us as a friend.

Over time, however, Jesus gets up from the table and begins to walk around our 'house' and as He does so He comes across other doors – some are wide open for Him to walk through, but some are closed – and at these doors He stands and knocks again. If we will open up, He will come in again bringing light into the darkness and the wind of the Spirit to blow away the cobwebs. The room is cleansed and He sits with us again to enjoy a meal as friends.

What sort of rooms are there?

- Our attitudes
- Our desires
- Our treasure
- Our emotions
- Our intellect
- Our hope
- Our fears
- Our will

Taking on the analogy a bit further, within each of these rooms there may be further rooms or cupboards, some open some closed.

Sin – the unwelcome (or welcome!) guest that infects.

Now the doors of our rooms can be shut for many different reasons. Sometimes it is because of something that has happened within one of these rooms that hurt us, or something that we are ashamed of. Sometimes it is because of our lack of confidence, sometimes because of a fear about what Jesus will say when He enters in.

Sometimes rooms in our lives are occupied by sin – either as a welcome or unwelcome guest.

Sin infects

If a room occupied by sin is left open then sin will not stay put – it will gradually infect other parts of your home. Some people who have a wrong understanding of grace think this is OK, they think that as long as they have let Jesus in it doesn't matter who or what else is left to roam. However the truth is that a house divided against itself will not stand, if we allow sin to roam freely there will inevitably be a conflict between the Spirit of God and sin.

Rooms shut and barred

For some of us the solution is to shut, lock and bar the rooms. We recognise the sin within and we are terrified of letting it out. In this case the level of Infection is greatly reduced but the power remains and from time to time there can be 'breaks outs'. There is also the problem that this 'room' for us becomes unusable, we are diminished.

The room cleansed and restored

That is why the solution is not to remove the room, as a surgeon would remove an infected organ, because we will not function as God intended if we are missing that 'room' (or organ).

The answer is, with the careful leading of the Holy Spirit (hand in hand) to open the room and have the sin completely removed. So the room is cleansed and made usable again (or maybe for the very first time).

Sanctified

This process of Jesus knocking at the rooms within our lives until we allow Him to enter, to cleanse by His Spirit and then to eat with us as friends, is what is often called sanctification. It is the process of us being changed into Jesus likeness and it continues through our life – no one has every room and cupboard open and cleansed all at once.

Conclusion

So as I draw to a close this morning, let me emphasise again that salvation is primarily about a restoration in relationship with God, not just an escape route from hell. We change not from the outside in (by keeping rules) but from the inside out (by allowing the Holy Spirit to change us into the image of Jesus). The speed and extent of change is dependent upon our willingness to open the inner doors of our heart to Jesus as He knocks and offers to come in by His Spirit to cleanse, refresh and renew.