
04 Genuine Discipleship: The Journey Begins

How can we change?

Today we will frame our quest for genuine discipleship, transformation and growth to maturity as a journey to the end of becoming more Christlike. Whenever you plan to go on a journey or on a trip, what are the essential things you need to know before you start?

1. You need to know where you are going and how to get there.
2. You need to know where you are starting from.

If you are in east St. Louis and going to west St. Louis, you go west. What if you *think* you are in East St. Louis, but you are *actually* in San Francisco and you go west? You'll get wet, it's the ocean! The Bible is clear on who we are, where we are, our propensity to sin and what we are really like. We really do need to know why we have all of these challenges in life. Why do I have all these areas in my life I want to change and can't seem to. Why am I 50-60-70 years old and am doing the same things I did when I was 30-40 and I didn't like them then; why do I have habits I can't seem to break and change? We wouldn't know unless God told us, and God has told us why we are the way we are and have the issues we do.

So, we're going to first explore who we are and why we are and how the change process actually takes place.

We All Have Issues and Need to Change

We all have some issues, whether large or small, and the Bible is clear on how we can address that. It's a journey, our goal is Christlikeness, and there are a lot of different ways that the scriptures address and portray that, but it all leads to the same thing: to be Christlike. You could say it's in the two commandments, "You are to love the Lord God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength; and your neighbor as yourself." There are verses in the epistles that talk about walking worthy of the calling, walking worthy of God, walking worthy of the Word, walking worthy of the Lord. That word is *axiōs* which means "on par with; measuring on a standard of, having worth that matches actual value."

We want to walk worthy of what God has called us to, but we've got obstacles, challenges—we need to know who we are and why we haven't been able to do that. We're going to start in Romans 1. If you read the whole Bible from beginning to end, you might say wow, that's really negative, so much sin, so many calamities; people have so many issues and why is that? Of course, we can go back to Genesis 1 where Adam and Eve were created in the image of God, to be like God, to exhibit his characteristics and attributes. What happened? Genesis 3 and 'the fall.' Adam lost the spirit of God within him, and God went through the drama of restoring man to the position that he initially intended with the spirit of God and it will end with us being Christlike in the end.

Romans 8:29

29 For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

That's where we're going, that's where we'll be for eternity. It says when Christ returns, we will be like him, we will see him as he is.

The Attributes of Fallen Man

Let's look at the attributes of fallen man:

Romans 1:28

And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done.

In essence it is saying they didn't think God was really worth thinking about. It's talking about Gentiles here; they knew about God. You can see this if you read earlier in Romans about creation. Everybody has a conscience and God's divine nature can be perceived by looking at His creation.

Romans 1:20

For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.

People can tell there is a God; there's a creator! However, they didn't see fit to acknowledge God, so God gave them up. God never violates man's free will. God simply gave them up to a debased mind (which is what you'd end up with if you're not thinking the thoughts of God) to do what ought not to be done.

Romans 1:29-32

29 They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips.

Oh, you might think gossip isn't so bad, compared to other types of sin, but it's in this list of sins. God gives a list of sins—not describing one person (one can become judgmental and not see themselves in the list). These are elements of the fallen human sinful nature and different ones of us have issues with different things.

30 slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents;

Now how did that slide in there? Disobedient to parents?! That's the way children are, just look at the world today, disobedient to parents. It's sinful, but it's part of human nature. In proverbs we read about the necessity to discipline the foolishness out of a child, but disobedience to parents is a big deal.

31 foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. **32** Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.

Think about our contemporary society today too—not only do we have groomers, encouraging people in grammar and middle school and high school to go transgender (they've got to know it's wrong), but doctors and corporations and school and hospital systems approve of it and give approval to those that practice it. They even encourage it!

So, this is a list of sinful human behavior and then, discussing the Gentiles (remember there's no chapter break in the original, it's inserted by man). The Jews are reading it and saying, "we're not that bad; see how bad they (the Gentiles) really are?"

I want to clarify by what God really means by certain words: we'll see the word 'evil' in here and then we'll think of the word 'sin.' We perceive evil as someone like Hitler or Soros as really evil, but what we might do is consider sin versus evil. But sin is sin, and all of it is worthy of death, like it says, "The wages of sin is death and those who practice those things deserve to die." (Romans 1:32)

Thank God we have a Savior, Jesus Christ, who took all these things upon himself. But we should get to the place of recognizing and admitting that sin is evil. Think of all the words in the scriptures that describe what sin is like. Look through the Old Testament: human beings are sinful, deceitful, rebellious, covetous. That doesn't go well in our society, does it? Didn't Jesus know that we have a self-image and self-worth problem here that we need to elevate? "You can't tell me I'm evil or sinful in wanting to do such and such!" But again, God tells us who we are and the way we are so that we can change from the way we are to Christlikeness, and it's a miracle that it's even possible when we read about our propensity to sin. Human beings are covetous, selfish, idolatrous, wicked, prideful, stubborn, envious, filled with hate, hypocritical, greedy, lawless, hardheaded and you think, Michael, I came here to get uplifted--we're going to get there, but again, **we first need to know our starting point.**

The tendency is to think, because of our human nature, "You know, I'm not that bad, look at the guy down the street, he's really bad, but I'm a good guy." But when we realize our nature and our propensity to sin, then we can address it and address it from God's perspective and how we can change.

Romans. 2:1-3

1 Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things. **2** We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things. **3** Do you suppose, O man—you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself—that you will escape the judgment of God?

It's going to lead into Romans: we need help; thank God for the Lord Jesus Christ, the savior who really paid for all our sins, he took all our sins upon the cross, and when you stop to think about that, as awesome as that is, that we can have Christ born within us, have eternal life, our response is gratitude.

But just think of that word 'evil' for a minute from v. 29.

Romans 1:29

29 They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, **evil**, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips.

Matthew 7:7-11

7 “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. **8** For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds,

We know from Jeremiah if you seek me with all your heart you’ll find me.

and to the one who knocks it will be opened. **9** Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone?

Note the culture at the time—a basket of round bread could look like the stones in the area.

10 Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent?

A serpent could slither into a basket of fish.

11 If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!

Nobody chimed in to argue about being evil—they knew the O.T. records of believers knowing the law but were never able to do it. Earthly parents have an innate impulse to do what is best for their children, yet they are flawed as a result of sin’s corruption of all humanity through the fall of Adam and Eve. The quality of their parenting doesn’t come close to matching God’s. It’s hard to come to grips with the fact that our propensity to sin as descendants of Adam, includes the rebellious nature to not want to do God’s Word.

The Old Testament Law’s Response to Evil

Since we’re talking about evil, you might be shocked to hear and to read about some of the things that happened in the O.T. as a response to evil and what evil was.

Deuteronomy 21:18-21

18 “If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey the voice of his father or the voice of his mother, and, though they discipline him, will not listen to them, **19** then his father and his mother shall take hold of him and bring him out to the elders of his city at the gate of the place where he lives, **20** and they shall say to the elders of his city, ‘This our son is stubborn and rebellious; he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton and a drunkard.’ **21** **Then all the men of the city shall stone him to death with stones.** So, you shall purge the evil from your midst, and all Israel shall hear, and fear.

Are you kidding? Stone a child to death? That’s how seriously God takes sin and evil. Thank God, Christ came and fulfilled the law, and we are no longer under the law but now live in the age of grace. But the message here is: sin is serious! When we get into the gospels where Christ said, “If your eye offend you, pluck it out, if your hand offend...”—it’s serious. Today we don’t recognize the seriousness of sin and when we do see where and what we are and what we’ve done and the penalty of sin is so great, we’re grateful for the Messiah, the Savior. ‘So ye shall purge evil from your midst’ in verse 21! What would our society be like if we were to stone to death all the drunkards or gluttons?

Deuteronomy 17 provides a paradigm shift, a change in mind, understanding how God viewed sin. He gave them the law so they could know how to live and what righteousness was. They were unable to keep it. Christ was the answer, but then after we have accepted Christ, and

been born again, what are we going to do with the rest of our lives? Do we want to be transformed into his likeness, his image, and how do we do that?

Deuteronomy 17:2-7

2 If there is found among you, within any of your towns that the Lord your God is giving you, a man or woman who does what is evil in the sight of the Lord your God, in transgressing his covenant, **3** and has gone and served other gods and worshiped them, or the sun or the moon or any of the host of heaven, which I have forbidden, **4** and it is told you and you hear of it, then you shall inquire diligently, and if it is true and certain that such an abomination has been done in Israel, **5** then you shall bring out to your gates that man or woman who has done this evil thing, **and you shall stone that man or woman to death with stones. 6** On the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses the one who is to die shall be put to death; a person shall not be put to death on the evidence of one witness. **7** The hand of the witnesses shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hand of all the people. So you shall purge the evil from your midst.

Think back to [Romans 3:9](#), the nature of man: there's no one good, no not one. It talks about our condition and our need for a savior. We are saved not by our works, but Christ's work.

Romans 7:15-20

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. **16** Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. **17** So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. **18** For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. **19** For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. **20** Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.

Perhaps you have made a list of changes you want to see in yourself, things to do or not do, resolutions. But then you do the opposite and wonder why in the world? We lack the ability because of sin that dwells in us. So, this is who and what we are, but in light of that, look at Romans 15. This is the same writer, same book! Verse 14, again same book. We've read Romans 1,3,5,7,8 about walking by the flesh.

We Can Become Full of Goodness

Now read here in Romans 15...what seems to be the opposite!

Romans 15:14

14 I myself am satisfied about you, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able to instruct one another. **15** But on some points I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God

Now the words God uses have meaning. The word full is '[mestos](#)' in Greek. There are lots of words translated full and filled, but this is only used 9 times. It's the same word used in the gospels when it says they took the sponge filled with vinegar to give to Christ. It was filled, it was soaked with vinegar. Paul is saying, "You are filled with goodness and you are full of all knowledge and able to instruct one another," and that is where we can actually go. How can we

go from sin to being filled with goodness? It's only by the miracle of not only the new birth, but the growing to maturity so that we can actually be Christlike.

Four Uses of the Word Translated "Goodness"

I looked further at the word goodness. It only shows up four times in the New Testament. The words in the Word define what the word means—'full of goodness'—this will give us insight into how people with a sin nature can actually change. It's a miraculous, transformative thing.

Galatians 5:22 is one of the four places where this word for goodness, '[agathosune](#)' shows up. Let's look at the whole section starting in v.16.

Galatians 5:16-22

16 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. **17** For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. **18** But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. **19** Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, **20** idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, **21** envy,^d drunkenness, orgies, and things like these.

Romans 1 and 1Timothy 3 and 4 both have long lists of sinful behaviors.

Galatians 5:21b

I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. **22** But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, **23** gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. **24** And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

Goodness here is '[agathosune](#).' How do you think those believers felt about being told they were full of goodness? They were filled with God's spirit and had to be walking by the spirit reckoning the old man and the flesh dead and then they were exhibiting love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control against which there is no law. Those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires and the only way we can live that way where we are exhibiting love, etc. We don't have it within our flesh or within our own resources to actually exhibit the fruit of the spirit. We can't. You've probably taken some courses, as I have on "self-help"—I want to be a better person, I want to improve this area of my life, I want to change this area of my life so I'm going to read some self-help books and take some self-help courses and it's a billion dollar industry, but if it was really successful, they'd be out of business! It doesn't work because it's a spiritual problem which is our propensity to sin and can only be addressed with a spiritual solution, which is Christ in you, the new nature, the new man and being transformed by renewing the mind.

Two other places it shows up: Eph. 5:1 This is the goal. Think of the list of Romans 1, think of the behavior we've discussed and then look at

Ephesians. 5:1-11

1 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children.

Me? With a propensity to sin be an imitator of God? Why? Because in Genesis we were created in His image and to be like Him and reflect His attributes and characteristics, but something happened and then because of Christ, it's possible again. "Be imitators of God as beloved children." And how do we do that?

[2](#) And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. [3](#) But sexual immorality

Just look at our society today with people addicted to all kinds of things and pornography, etc.

and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. [4](#) Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place,

I mean, is God serious—crude joking?), As an aside, how does this actually happen? You can try on your own to say ok, I'm never going to tell an off-colored joke or engage in foolish talk anymore and you try and try, and you still do it. But there's another way that it happens. When we start to change and grow in the Word, you realize you're not doing that anymore. How did that happen. When did I become kind and good; how did it happen that things I used to think were funny and I don't think they're funny anymore, how did that happen? That's the spirit of God at work within us.

but instead let there be thanksgiving. [5](#) For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. [6](#) Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. [7](#) Therefore do not become partners with them; [8](#) for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light [9](#) (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good [[agathosune](#)] and right and true), [10](#) and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. [11](#) Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.

2 Thessalonians 1:11-12

[11](#) To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every **resolve for good** [[agathosune](#)] and every work of faith by his power, [12](#) so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ

'[agathosune](#)' here is a difficult Greek construction of the word for goodness. It's in the objective genitive case, that is to say that goodness is the object of your desire. Paul prays that God will fulfill the Thessalonians every desire for goodness. You have a desire towards goodness. Instead of the desire of being/doing the lust of the flesh and doing what I want, with the focus on me, "goodness" is the object or focus of my desire. How in the world (Word) did people who have a propensity toward sin get to the place where their desire is for goodness for other people? It's only in the transformative power of the spirit of God, in the Word of God, that we obtain that since we're innately selfish. This genitive phrase likely has a second meaning of a desire that flows out of goodness. Those are the 4 places that '[agathosune](#)' shows up. Regardless of the fact that we have a propensity to sin, we can change to be Christlike, and this gives us hope.

Any Journey Takes Time and Effort.

The Epistles give us the roadmap on this journey on how this actually takes place. It takes time and effort. And it can't be explained in a few minutes.

My sister-in-law is an extremely bright, newspaper editor, who has worked in different departments, mostly doing book reviews. When they switched her to the Faith and Values section, since she's agnostic, she called us for help. She said I have an hour, tell me everything you know about faith and values and tell me all about Christians and Christianity and what they do and how they think.

We laughed but did our best. She also interviewed other well-known people, but to think it can be covered in a short period of time...it's impossible! Remember that prayer that I've shared by Alistair Begg in Cleveland?

Make the Book live for me, Oh Lord,

Make the Book live for me.

Show me Thyself, Show me myself, Show me my Savior.

Make the book live for me.

God, make the book live for me. Show me who you are, show me who I am. You might ask why one should spend so much time to study and read God's Word, which is time consuming and after all, we have a life and so many things to do. It reminds me of Moses, in Deuteronomy, when he tells the children of Israel—remember that God is your life.

Colossians.3:1-5

1 If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. **2** Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. **3** For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. **4** **When Christ who is your life appears**, then you also will appear with him in glory. **5** Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

When Christ who is your life shall appear. So if God is my life and Christ is my life and it says the Word of life; Romans says the spirit is life, then asking: "Don't you know I have a life?" it's not this life and it's not the life that God designed for us to have, which is life in Him, in Christ, in the Word and walking by the spirit. And that is what enables us to actually live the way that God designed us to live. Look at all the pain that people endure.

I'll close with this, consider what we must be willing to do. It can be difficult but have the hope of being filled with goodness and walking by the spirit. It says we can be in Christ and Christ is in us. We are in the Word and the Word can be in us. We can be in God, and God in us. We can be in the kingdom and the kingdom in us. We live in the spirit and the spirit in us.

At the end of 2nd Corinthians Paul says: examine yourselves to see whether you're in the faith.

2 Corinthians 13:5-5

5 Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not

realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? —unless indeed you fail to meet the test! [6](#) I hope you will find out that we have not failed the test.

Go ahead and examine yourselves to see if you're in the faith. Test yourselves. When you go to the doctor, you have symptoms, pain or bronchitis, so the doctor has to look inside to find the root cause of what is manifesting itself externally. The doctor examines you. He may order an MRI, x-ray, stress test, etc. Examine what's inside to determine what's outside. Paul says test yourselves. For us to be willing to go through the process of going humbly before God and say o.k., I'm not living the way that I should be in this area of my life, I have to be able to examine my own heart: God, please show me via the Word and your spirit at work in me and guess what He'll do? He doesn't hesitate. Those can be tough days. But we have the hope and the knowledge that we can be transformed into Christlikeness.