

Changing Beliefs

“Every system is perfectly designed to get the results it gets.” This quote is attributed to several different people and is a well-known idea that is often considered by management teams trying to boost the output of their companies. For the output or product to be better, something in the current system needs to be revamped, added, or removed. Part of what is interesting about this quote is it can also be applied on an individual level. “Every [belief] system is perfectly designed to get the results [or behaviors] it gets.” You may have heard of certain high-profile Christian teachers (or even other Christians you may know) who have been caught in serious moral failures. And maybe, in response to the news, you have heard someone say something like, “They didn’t live up to their faith.” The reality, however, may go much deeper. The truth is that what those individuals came to believe at their cores about what they thought was good for them became painfully obvious through their actions. The same is true for you and me - our lives are governed by our beliefs.

Jesus, of course, taught this too in his Sermon on the Mount, “*Ye shall know them by their fruits. . . Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.*” (Matt. 7:16-18) And again, in *Matthew 23:26*, “. . . *Cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also.*” We often spend much time and energy trying to get people to do things we think they should be doing. Jesus knew and taught that real change, however, came from the inside and worked its way outward. Even those who knew the right things and taught the Scriptures, the scribes and Pharisees for instance referenced in *Matthew 23*, were being called out for their unbelieving hearts when Jesus said to the crowd, “*All therefore whatsoever they [the teachers of the law] bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not.*” (Matt. 23:3) Perhaps some people, like the teachers of the law, even think they believe something that they may not actually believe. Their beliefs are borne out by their actions.

Considering this, how do we as followers of Jesus approach our calling to make other followers of Jesus?

First, we must intend to come alongside others to help them identify the deep-seated beliefs they have which keep them from full confidence in Jesus. As believers, we can encourage and help others see Jesus as the most well-informed person about reality; that He is the Creator and Sustainer of all. And then, we must carry this intention through to its completion.

As we prayerfully and wisely carry out this work in tandem with the Spirit of God, believers should avoid the temptation to manage people’s behaviors. Our aim should not be to get people to behave a certain way; our aim should be to help people genuinely believe a certain way which naturally results in Godly behavior.

How might we do this?

A good method for doing this would be to study the way Jesus interacted with his close followers in the New Testament - when disciple-making was at its best. People were enticed to change their beliefs (repent) and fully rely on Jesus as he proclaimed and demonstrated the Kingdom of God (*Matt. 4:23*). Through Jesus, people were offered an entrance into a life that revealed what reality really is like, “*In him was life; and the life was the light of men.*” (*John 1:4*) The message that was carried made Jesus real and intimately involved in lives of people right where they were. We won’t be successful if we try to force people into right belief by merely stating Christian dogma. We must gently help others see what they *genuinely* do believe about life and help them to be honest about it. And then we may draw them to right belief in the same way Jesus and his close followers did – through proclaiming the Kingdom of God and backing up that proclamation with our deeds. Consider how Jesus made disciples through his teaching as well as his meeting of practical needs of those around him – feeding the hungry, caring for the sick, receiving the outcasts. God’s action was shown to be available to humankind right where they are. We too can help lead people into fuller confidence in Jesus if we teach God’s Kingdom and, when joined with meeting their present needs, practically make it real to them wherever they are.