

810 What about Change?

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God's Answers to Life's Questions

If you listen much to the news you will hear a lot about the need to change. People seem to be unhappy and want things to be different. What about change? Is change good or bad? Are there things we don't need to change or want to change? Well, change faces all of us. We need God's help and guidance as we journey through life. Today we're asking the question, "What about change?" The dictionary defines change this way: "to make different in some particular, to alter, to modify, to transform, to replace, or to switch." Life and circumstances have a way of bringing change to us. Some we welcome and other changes are terrible. In Exodus 1:8-10, the Bible tells about a change that hurt Israel. The Bible says: Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. And he said to his people, "Behold, the people of Israel are too many and too mighty for us. Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and, if war breaks out, they join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land."

The cost of living in 1900 was approximately 5% of today's cost. The average annual income for a family of 5 persons was \$750. A number of modern conveniences were not available then or difficult to obtain—examples would be radios, televisions, automobiles, computers, automatic washing machines, advanced medical care or often sanitary food and water. Other conveniences were only known to the middle and upper classes such as piped hot water and bathtubs, central heating, electric light, telephones and large houses. Iced tea hadn't been invented.

In 1900 the American flag had 45 stars. Arizona, Oklahoma, New Mexico, Hawaii and Alaska hadn't been admitted to the Union yet. They had the problem of drive-by shootings — in which teenage boys galloped down the street on horses and started randomly shooting at houses, carriages, or anything else that caught their fancy. This was an ongoing problem in Denver and other cities in the West. There was no Mother's Day or Father's Day. One in ten US adults couldn't read or write. Only 6 percent of all Americans had graduated from high school. Eighteen percent of households in the United States had at least one full-time servant or domestic. Things were truly different.

Things have certainly changed a lot since then. People then would talk about America being a Christian nation. There were very few divorcees. Homosexuality and abortion were considered abnormal and sinful. Children studied from readers that emphasized faith, Christian morals, and the Bible. They saluted the flag and had prayer each morning. People in those days believed that living moral lives and working hard mattered. There was no social security or Medicare, so the people learned to depend on prayer and faith.

Someone has said, "The only person who likes change is a wet baby." But changes take place, and many people are as fickle as the weather. Paul describes the immature person as one who is "tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes" (Ephesians 4:14). Some people like those at Mars Hill are always enamored by whatever is new and different. Some people assume that everything new is better and everything old is wrong. While many of us delight in the advancement of conveniences, many of the changes of our time have taken far from God.

We live in fickle times: There is a humorous story about Paul after the shipwreck on the island of Malta found in Acts 28:3-6. The Bible says: When Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and put them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat and fastened on his hand. When the native people saw the creature hanging from his hand, they said to one another, "No doubt this man is a murderer. Though he has escaped from the sea, Justice has not allowed him to live." He, however, shook off the creature into the fire and suffered no harm. They were waiting for him to swell up or suddenly fall down dead. But when they had waited a long time and saw no misfortune come to him, they changed their minds and said that he was a god. Oh, how fickle!

We are hearing much about change in our society. That seems to be the word that politicians use and sometimes preachers. We are told that the church must either change or die. Of course when they say things like this, we need to point to the teaching of the New Testament. If we are

changing to be more like the New Testament, that is good; but if we are moving away from the will of God, that is bad. Many people trust their feelings rather than test the changes by the Bible. They sometimes fool themselves by saying the Holy Spirit has moved them to make this change. If that change is contradictory to the Word of God, the Bible, then you can be sure the Holy Spirit is not behind it.

Some change is healthy and good, while other changes corrupt and defile. Let's think about some good changes. We want our children to grow into adulthood, to grow mentally and physically and in favor with God and man. The Bible teaches us in 2 Peter 3:18, "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen." Further, we want friends to wash themselves and change their clothes, to mow their yards, and to pay their bills. When we have sinned, we long for forgiveness from God and others. Forgiveness is a change of heart, where the forgiving person no longer holds a transgression against the forgiven.

Then, there is repentance. Repentance is a blessing given to us from God. How thankful I am that God gives me opportunity to change my life. Jesus told this parable in Matthew 21:28-31, "What do you think? A man had two sons. And he went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today.' And he answered, 'I will not,' but afterward he changed his mind and went. And he went to the other son and said the same. And he answered, 'I go, sir,' but did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said, "The first." When people change their lives to do the will of God, they are a blessing to themselves and to everyone around them.

Life is filled with necessary changes. We replace batteries, tires, cars, clothes, and glasses. We take medicine to relieve painful symptoms and to recover from illness. We can't say that all change is bad. There are times when a change of heart and life are absolutely necessary for us to please God. Peter Marshall prayed, "Lord, when we are wrong, make us willing to change. And when we are right, make us easy to live with." Well, a dose of humility would do us all good. Change is important, when it leads us closer to God and away from worldliness or selfishness.

Some changes, however, are harsh and evil to us and those around us. Illness or accidents can bring about tragic changes that ruin lives and families. Sin can bring about terrible consequences like disease, jail or broken families in addition to separation from God. The Bible says in Romans 6:23 that the wages of sin is death. That's a change we cannot wish on anyone. Spiritual death means a separation from the love and grace of God. There is no change worse than that. Sin is truly the worst evil of all. The apostle regretfully said in 2 Timothy 4:10 that "Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica." Demas not only left Paul, he left God out of his life. This is a sad and terrible change.

Other bad changes come when people listen to the wrong people. There will always be teachers who teach things they think people want to hear rather than God's truth. God predicted in 2 Peter 2:1-2, "But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed." Hearing and following a false teacher is a bad change. False teachers leave people with false hope. They think they are serving God, but in reality they are deceived and following another man. Be careful what you hear and to whom you listen! When we think of change, we must ask, "what kind of change is it? Will it help or hurt?"

There are some things, however, that nothing can change. God put them in place, and man is not powerful enough to change them. Here are four things nothing can change. First, nothing can change the past. Job, in the midst of his suffering cried out in Job 29:2, "Oh that I were as in months gone by, As in the days when God watched over me." Most of us can remember when times were different and how we wish we could turn back the clock. How often I have wanted just one more time to speak to

friends and loved ones who have died. How often I wished I could take back something I said or did and could do it over again. Since I cannot change the past, I must make the most of the present and live my life in a way that I won't regret it later.

Second, no one can change God's love and grace. In Hebrews 13:5 He Himself has said, "I WILL NEVER DESERT YOU, NOR WILL I EVER FORSAKE YOU." I am so thankful for that. God's love and grace is given in Christ Jesus, who died for our sins. No one can take away that love or snatch you or me out of God's hand. Now, you or I can leave God's love and walk away from His grace, and we can lose our salvation. But God will never desert the faithful. You can count on God to keep His promises. Paul said in Romans 8:38-39, "For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." That promise encourages my heart.

Third, no one can change God's truth found in the Bible. David said in Psalm 119:89, "Forever, O LORD, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens." Jesus the Lord said in Matthew 24:35, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away." People can dismiss the teaching of the Bible, ignore it, argue against it or try to destroy God's truth in His Word; but it will survive as strong as ever. You may not like the Bible, but one day the Bible will be the one and only authority that will judge your soul. My friend, those who fight against God and His word will lose in the end. Solomon said in Proverbs 21:30-31, "There is no wisdom and no understanding and no counsel against the LORD. The horse is prepared for the day of battle, but victory belongs to the LORD."

Fourth, no one can change or stop the coming Judgment. The Holy Spirit spoke through Paul at Mar's Hill and said in Acts 17:30-31, "Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead."

Then, there are some things we dare not change. God has given us His perfect will. Changing it puts our souls in peril. First, we dare not change the gospel. God says in Galatians 1:8-9, "But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed." The gospel has the power to save our souls. Anyone who tampers with the gospel will cost people their souls.

Second, we dare not change anything in the Word of God. The apostle Paul said in 2 Corinthians 4:2-3, "But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God." Adding to or taking away from the words of the Bible only corrupts God's will. We have no right to change God's teaching, and we are not wise enough to improve on it. Rather than change God's Word, which is disgraceful, we ought to submit to it.

There is nothing else out there as good and holy as God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. God prophesied through Jeremiah in Jeremiah 2:11-13, asking, "Has a nation changed its gods, even though they are no gods? But my people have changed their glory for that which does not profit. Be appalled, O heavens, at this; be shocked, be utterly desolate, declares the LORD, for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water." Many people trade the glory and grace of God for a religion of their own making. I must tell you that there is nothing out there better than what God has given us.

Third, we dare not change our commitment to Christ. We must remain faithful to the Lord all the days of our lives. I have known many people who started out well as Christians. They loved the Lord and His church. They were enthusiastic in the worship and service to the Lord. But distractions or sin got hold of them, and they quit putting the Lord Jesus first in their lives. Some quit on Him altogether. In Luke 9:62, Jesus said, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God." The worst change anyone can make is to forsake his faith in the Lord and to go back into sin and the world. My friend, I hope and pray you never do that.

In 1848, Ignaz Semmelweis discovered the simple technique of having a physician wash his hands in a chlorine solution before delivering a baby. In the Vienna General Hospital where he worked, women were dying from infection. In fact, many Viennese women would rather have their baby on the street than in that hospital. Semmelweis changed this by having the doctors wash their hands. This handwashing procedure immediately reduced the maternal mortality rate in the clinic from 13 percent to less than 1 percent! Twelve years later, in 1860, in the same clinic, 35 out of 101 mothers died. What happened? Semmelweis was perceived as a flake, a disrupter, someone who had extreme political views. Physicians didn't take him seriously, so nobody listened. They quit the handwashing procedure, and the women began once again to die. Semmelweis died in 1865. It was another two decades before Lister and Pasteur came along and proved him to be right all along. In this instance, the failure of doctors to change cost thousands of women their very lives. Even sadder than that is to live a whole life and not hear God and be converted. How many good souls have been and will be lost because they failed to listen and take seriously the message of the gospel. My friend, I pray that you will take the cross and the love of Christ seriously enough to make a change in your life. Believe in the Lord Jesus with all your heart. Without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6). Change your heart from sin to Christ. Repentance is turning away from sin and turning to the Lord Jesus. Confess the name of the Lord before others. Let everyone know you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. And be baptized! In baptism, God changes you. In your obedience to the gospel by baptism, God causes you to die to sin. Your sins are forgiven. He causes you to die with Christ, be buried with Christ, and be raised with Christ to walk a new life (Romans 6:3-7). God wants to save you and add you to His church. He wants to call you His son or daughter. God is willing to change you, but He won't do it unless you respond to Him in faith and obedience. Wouldn't today be a great day to obey God, so that He may change you?

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