



UNCHANGING THINGS IN A CHANGING WORLD

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Our world is intoxicated with the excitement and appeal of change. Postmodernism has erased any lines that used to exist between right and wrong and truth and error. Modernity has rapidly ushered in the secularization of society and the breaking down of just about any social norm or tradition. We're really starting to live in a day of anarchy. We're seeing it everywhere -- culturally, politically, morally, and religiously. And while it's not new -- the pace with which it has transformed our world is really dizzying. Philosophies, lifestyles, ideologies that sounded shocking and we believed only represented the fringe of our civilized society are no longer shocking at all. In fact, we wonder, what could possibly be next? This is, of course, the design of Satan and part of his agenda of evil -- to undermine the truth, deceive people, and cause them to be forever lost. It is hard to imagine, if time goes on much longer, what our world will be like in just a few years from now. But there's a wonderful assurance in the word of God that I want to remind you of today... James 1:17 says; "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning."

Sometimes change is badly needed and sometimes it improves our lives. But not all change is good. Change just for the sake of change is certainly not good and change that leads to the abandonment of truth and morality isn't good -- it's detrimental. The old song says, "Time is filled with swift transition; naught of earth unmoved can stand; Build your hopes on things eternal and hold to God's unchanging hand." I like the phrase: "Build your hopes on things eternal." That's so very true. If you're placing your hopes on the modern culture, you're going to be left very disappointed because nothing here remains the same for very long.

We're talking today about 'UNCHANGING THINGS IN A CHANGING WORLD'. And one thing that has not changed is man's propensity to change. The culture of the Greeks and of the ancient Roman empire in many ways is much like our culture today. They may have ridden in chariots instead of cars but behaviorally and philosophically, there's not a lot of difference. The things that Paul found and confronted on his missionary journeys are, in many cases, the same things in one form or another, that

we find in the world today. Two-thousand years ago, Paul preached to the people of Athens and the Bible says in Acts 17:21 that they “spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing.” That’s much like people now. Everything is relative and change is to be desired, but anything rooted in tradition or considered absolute is to be shunned and ridiculed. But while the world restlessly drifts from one philosophy to the next... and people bend their worldview to go with the ebb and flow of mainstream society... there are some things that haven’t changed – don’t change – and will NEVER change. And thank God we can “build our hopes on things eternal”; that we can anchor our souls to the Rock of Ages...

I want to begin by saying that God and His divine character are unchanging. Sometimes we reduce God to our own likeness. It’s hard for us to conceive of a being that transcends time, no less, One Who is eternal.

Nonetheless, the scriptures clearly affirm that God is in Hebrews 11:6. Now, some today claim that God “WAS”! Essentially what they believe is that the God of ancient times is different from the God of today. The God revealed in scripture is contrary to the god many want to believe in, and so they have tried to give God a makeover and transform into a being more suited to their liking. Paul said that the Gentiles did this long ago in Romans chapter 1. They suppressed the truth because they didn’t want to live the kind of lives that God expected them to live and so “they changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made LIKE corruptible man.” Well, man is fickle and man changes. Man has typically been driven by the pursuit of pleasure and the glorification of self... and so, humankind has created a god that allows them to do as they please and live like they want to live without guilt or impunity. The religious world has helped lead the charge to change the way people see God. No longer do we present Him as a God who hates and punishes sin and demands repentance of us... but instead. He has been characterized as a doting, heavenly grandfather who lets us get by with mischief – or a cosmic bellhop who is there to do whatever we need Him to do in response to our occasional tips we give Him, and it considered completely out of place to believe in and preach about a God who is holy (set apart from sin) and who judges and punishes sinners. In other words -- many have ignored His holiness and His righteousness and turned Him into a pushover who just goes with the flow. Well, that’s not the God characterized throughout the scriptures.

The Bible indeed tells us that God is love according to 1 John 4:16. God deeply loves His creation -- without exception. His compassion and His benevolence toward man is unending. But the scriptures tell us that there is much more to the character and nature of God. When you only preach half the truth, you can end up making that half-truth, an untruth. Yes, God is love but at the same time, He is perfect and absolutely righteous. He cannot countenance sin by His very own nature. Now, thankfully, His mercy and His love provided us with the vicarious sacrifice of His own Son, Jesus, so that we could be made righteous in Him and have access to God. But that doesn’t change the fact that God detests sin and God doesn’t tolerate it.

The Bible tells us that the Old Testament as written for our learning...Romans 15:4. Well, the Old Testament gives us a very clear picture of God and His attitude toward sin as opposed to righteousness. Some people charge that God was a harsh and disciplinarian God in the Old Testament, but all of those stories are written to impress upon us just how God looks at sin. The very death of His own Son took place, in part, to show to mankind the awful penalty that sin exacts. Did you know, God hasn’t changed in that? Did you know the God who was angered by the disobedience and rebellion of His people thousands of years ago still gets angry when men trample His law underfoot today and splash through the blood of His Son? God hasn’t changed, my friend. The only thing that has changed is that God’s plan has provided us with a solution to sin, but the nature and character of God hasn’t changed one bit. The

Bible tells us in Romans 11:22 to “Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off.” Paul is warning the Gentiles who had just come to know salvation in Christ not to do as the Israelites had done in their rejection of God’s word or else the love and mercy that had given them salvation would turn to the same kind of wrath that consumed God’s wayward nation. Friend, don’t buy into this modern packaging of God that says that God is some benign being who is too loving to punish sin. He’s the same God you read about in Genesis 1:1 all the way to Revelation 22.

I’m glad to know I can depend on the God I read about in the scriptures instead of my concept of Him changing from one time to the next. Man may change. His behavior, His attitude, His character all may change over time, but God does not. God is not dead. God is not diminished in His power. He has not abdicated His place as the creator and sovereign controller of this universe. And He has not forgotten what He has said in His word. Remember, James said in James 1:17 that in Him there is NO variableness or shadow of turning. Here James says that He is the God and ruler even of the sun and moon. And though the sun may rise and set and the moon may hide in the shadows of earth God doesn’t change. He is always the same.

Second, the Word of God doesn’t change. One of the wonderful things about the Bible is the fact that it is old and new at the same time. In other words, it may have been written down by inspiration of the Holy Spirit thousands of years ago but it’s as timely as this morning’s newspaper. If men would give the Bible half a chance and a semblance of a fair hearing, they might come to see just how relevant the Bible is today. I believe the word of God can answer every moral and spiritual question that man can ask today. Some people claim that we’ve outgrown the Bible. That in all our learning and sophistication, at some point along the way, we left the Bible behind. Now, it’s not the what the scriptures teach that we’re interested in, it’s what the latest Gallup poll says or what society has decided about a particular matter.

We no longer allow the Bible to tell us the difference between right and wrong.

Today, very few kinds of behavior are looked upon by the world as being wrong or sinful. We’ve justified everything from adultery to pornography, to homosexuality, to drunkenness, to covetousness, to gluttony, to abortion, and just about any other kind of behavior by throwing the Bible aside and doing what is right in our own eyes. In fact, there is no such thing as sin. You can hardly name any kind of conduct that you won’t find a group of people somewhere (including religious people) who won’t defend and justify that practice and tell us it’s not a sin. They either twist the scriptures to allow what is plainly condemned or they simply characterize the word of God as outdated and irrelevant to modern life. Friend, the mind of God hasn’t been changed about what is true and what is false; what is right and what is wrong; what is righteous conduct and what is evil conduct, since it was written down by inspiration of the Holy Spirit. If Christ and His apostles taught that something was wrong, it’s still wrong regardless of what the Supreme Court or the latest opinion poll says.

Peter declared in 1 Peter 1:24- 25 that “The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: But the word of the Lord endureth forever.” Jesus said that even heaven and earth would pass away but His word will never pass away (Matthew 24:35). The Bible is still as relevant and as true as it ever was. The problem is that men have rejected it. Now stop and think about what that does to us as a society. It makes everything subjective. It says that there is no such thing as absolute truth. And when men reject any absolute and universal standard for truth it creates as much chaos spiritually and morally as it would in society if we have no standards of weight and measurement. Could you imagine trying to function as a society if we have no set standard to weight things by or measure things by? What if we had no official

rules for language or mathematics? What if everything were left up to every individual to determine for his or herself? Surely you can see what confusion and chaos would result. Well, why is it that we refuse then to accept an absolute and unchanging standard when it comes to right and wrong or when it comes to ethical, moral, and religious issues?

Friend, can't you see that that's why the world is in the shape that it's in and furthermore, why religion is in the mess it is in today? It has become a free-for-all simply because we have rejected the Bible as the one source of absolute truth. Read the book of Judges! The key phrase that appears repeatedly is "in those days there was no king in Israel, and every man did what was right in his own eyes." Read the stories of that period and see what a state of anarchy, chaos, confusion, and evil reigned at that time! Friend, the word of God is unchanging. It remains today despite the thousands of years that have passed since it was written, and it warns us that one day our lives are going to be judge by what appears on its sacred pages. That standard is unchanging. Now again, I, for one, am glad that I have a Bible to turn to today. I'm glad that my spiritual and moral views don't have to be constantly reshaped because of the fact the world changes from one day and one year to the next. The Word of God is an unchanging thing that you can tether your soul to in these changing and perilous times.

Third, the Lord's church is an unchanging thing. The church is an ancient institution. We read of its beginning in Acts the second chapter. The events of that chapter took place on a Sunday morning in Jerusalem nearly 2,000 years ago. And did you know that in the eyes of God that institution that started back there so long ago hasn't changed? Christ built it just like He planned it and intends for it to be. The Bible says we have received a kingdom that can't be moved...Hebrews 12:28. And Jesus taught us that the unchanging word of God is the seed of that kingdom. In other words, it is constantly being reproduced in its original form every time the gospel of the New Testament is preached and obeyed. Now, there's something thrilling about that to me. It is an awesome thing to me to turn over to the book of Acts and read about the church that Jesus established two-thousand years ago and to know I'm a member today of that same institution. It humbles every time I come together with other Christians on the Lord's Day to break bread and to know that I am keeping a divinely given tradition that was established two millennia ago and that has taken place every Sunday somewhere, someplace, since that time. Friends, based on the what the Bible tells us about the church of the first century, I believe with all my heart that I'm a member of that same church and what I will do today when I gather with fellow disciples is in strict keeping with the pattern established by Christ and His apostles two-thousand years ago and you can be too. By only using the scriptures as a guide, I believe I can know exactly what they preached, how they lived and how they worshipped, and I can, in every point, follow that example.

The problem today is, too many people are ignoring that pattern. They tell us that the church needs to evolve and stay up with the times. As a result, we have more churches and denominations than you can count and ones as different from the next as daylight and dark. That's because people aren't looking to the early church as a paradigm. They see the church as an ever-evolving thing. But my question is, when the word of God is not seen as a pattern, how far can you go? How much can you change and still be the church of Christ in faith and practice? Jude said the faith "was once for all delivered to the saints" and that we are to contend for that faith. (Jude 3) The church that Jesus established is an unchanging thing. Governments change over the years. Nations may rise and fall. Societies may crumble. But there is one institution in the world you can count on to be the same and that's the church that Jesus built. Are you a member of the church that you read about in the Bible or are you part of a religious organization that gets its doctrine from whatever the thinking of the day happens to be?

Finally, I'm glad to tell you that the Lord's promises are unchanging in an unstable and uncertain world. Two thousand years ago our Lord left this old world. He gathered with His small band of disciples on Olives' brow and with the clouds as His chariot and the winds as His steeds, He went riding off to glory. But he left with a promise. The angel told those disciples that just as He went away, they would one day see Him return. Every eye will one day behold that event, the book of Revelation says. I believe that promise. I believe that one of these days the Lord is coming again. Now, I know there are plenty of folks who make fun of that. They're proving the Bible to be true right now by scoffing at and mocking the promise of our Lord. Peter said in 2 Peter 3 that in the last days there would be those who would scoff and say "where is the promise of His coming? For since the Fathers fell asleep all things continue as they were from the beginning on the creation." In other words, if He were really coming again, He would have been here long before now. But Peter goes on to say that a thousand years is like one day with the Lord and His promise remains. Like a thief in the night, He'll come back on day.

We live in uncertain and in many ways -- frightening times. What tomorrow holds is anyone's guess. We don't know what the future holds but we know who holds the future. I do know; one of these days the Lord's coming back, and He will end it all. One of these hours, the eastern sky will split, and the angel will put one foot on the land and one foot upon the sea and declare that time is no more. I'm certain about that and I'm also certain that if you're not making ready for it, you're making a very foolish mistake. The Lord's promises stand sure. His immutable promise is an unchanging thing in an ever-changing world.

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