

## “UNCHANGING THINGS IN A CHANGING WORLD”

We hear the drumbeat of change all around us. The world is changing today at a dizzying pace. But there are some things that will *never* change. Our nation and our world is intoxicated with the excitement and the 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 thus, the breaking down of just about any social norm or tradition. In fact, we're really starting to live in a day of anarchy. We're seeing it everywhere: culturally, politically, morally and religiously. While it's not new, the pace with which it has transformed our world as a whole is really dizzying. Think about the rapid change we've seen, just in the past few years. Philosophies, lifestyles, ideologies that sounded shocking and that we believed only represented the fringe of our civilized society, are no longer shocking at all. In fact, I think many of us wonder what could possibly be next. Well, that's the design of Satan, of course, and his agenda of evil: to undermine the truth and deceive people. It's hard to imagine if time goes on much longer what our world will be like just a few years from now.

But there is a wonderful assurance in the Word of God that I want to remind you of today.

**James 1:17 “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.”**

Now, sometimes change is badly needed. Sometimes it improves our lives. Not all change is bad. But then, not all change is good. Change just for the sake of change isn't necessarily a good thing, and change that leads to the abandonment of truth and compromised righteousness and morality certainly isn't good. It's detrimental. There's an old song that says:

*Time is filled with swift transition; naught of earth unmoved can stand.*

*Build your hopes on things eternal. Hold to God's unchanging hand...*

That's so very true. If you're placing your hopes on the modern culture, then you're building your hopes on the shifting sands. And you're going to be left very disappointed because nothing here remains the same for very long. But God's hand is unchanging, and I want to remind you of some unchanging things in this changing world.

One thing that has not changed is man's propensity to change. In many ways, the culture of the Greeks and of the ancient Roman Empire is much like our culture today. They may've ridden in chariots instead of cars, but behaviorally and philosophically, there are a lot of similarities. 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.

2000 years ago, Paul preached to the people of Athens. This is what the Bible has to say about the people of that city at that time:

**Acts 17:21 “For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing.”**

Well, doesn't that sound much like people today? Everything today is relative, we're told. Change is to be desired. 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 from one age to the next, and people bend their world view so as to go with the ebb and flow of mainstream society, there are still some things that have NOT changed, DON'T change and WILL NEVER change. Thank God we can build our hopes on things eternal and that we can anchor and tether 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 if we're not careful. It is very difficult for we as mortals to conceive of a being that transcends time and space, no less one who is eternal. Nonetheless, the scriptures clearly confirm that God IS.

**Hebrews 11:6 "But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him."**

That is a short but very profound statement. The Hebrew writer says that those who come to God must believe that HE IS. Not that He *was* or *will be*. But, God IS. That statement in and of itself reflects the unchanging nature of God. Essentially, what a lot of people today believe is that the God of ancient times is different from the God of today. That the God pictured in the scriptures is out of date, irrelevant and perhaps even unrealistic. As a result, those who haven't abandoned belief in Him altogether have really created a new god who is more agreeable with the modern philosophy. For example, it's easier for some people to believe in a god who used evolution to create the world over billions of years, than it is to believe the Bible record. That's easier than believing in an omnipotent God who created the world by His spoken word and by His power. I mean, if I can believe in a God that transcends time and space and in any capacity created the universe, then what's the problem in believing the Bible account?

**Genesis 17:1 "...the Lord appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God..."**

His power is limitless.

**Matthew 19:26 "...but with God all things are possible."**

**Acts 17:28 "For in him we live, and move, and have our being..."**

**John 21:17 "...And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things..."**

That's the portrait that God draws of Himself for us in His word. That's completely out of step with the thinking of our day, so instead, we have recreated God to be something that He is not, nor has He ever been. In the process, we have diluted the nature of God. What do I mean by that? We have tried to change the character of God. Many today have God made out to be some type of heavenly grandfather or cosmic bellhop, who benignly stays way off in heaven and really has no knowledge or involvement in our day to day lives, but He's there whenever we need or want something and if we'll only say a prayer, He is supposed to give us everything that we want. The problem is that people have ignored God's holiness and the image that they have created in their minds is not the image that God has presented of Himself in His word. Man today has conveniently ignored the holiness and the righteousness of God, and

has turned Him into a pushover who just goes with the flow. The result is, instead of man being created in God's image, we want a god that's created in OUR image. We want a god who doesn't make any demands, who accepts anything and everything, who doesn't interfere with our lives except when we think we need Him, and who doesn't have the capacity to punish sin and sinners.

Well, that is NOT the God characterized throughout the scriptures. The Bible does tell us that God is love.

**I John 4:16 "And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him."**

It doesn't just say that God has the capacity to love, but that He IS love. He is the very definition of love, the very manifestation of love. God deeply loves His creation, and that is without exception. His compassion and His benevolence toward man is unfailing. But the scriptures tell us that there's more to the nature of God. God is perfect and God is absolutely righteous. As a result, He cannot countenance sin, and by His very own nature, He must disassociate Himself from it and punish sin. Now, thankfully, His mercy and His love provided us with the vicarious sacrifice of His own Son, Jesus, so that, through forgiveness, we could be made righteous in Him and have access to God. But that wonderful fact doesn't change the fact that God detests sin and that He has no fellowship with it. God does not tolerate it.

**Romans 15:4 "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope."**

The Old Testament gives us a very clear picture of God and His attitude towards sin, as opposed to righteousness. Some people charge that God was a harsh disciplinarian God in the Old Testament. But all of those stories were written to impress upon us just how God looks at sin. The very death of His own Son took place, in part, to show mankind the awful penalty that sin exacts. Did you know that God hasn't changed in that? 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 and splash through the blood of Calvary. God hasn't changed, my friend. The only thing that has changed is that God's plan has now provided us with a solution to sin. But the nature and character of God himself hasn't changed at all.

**Romans 11:22 "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 been given them in salvation would turn to the very same kind of wrath that consumed God's wayward nation. So, my friend, don't buy into this modern packaging of God that says that He is some benign being who is too loving to punish sin. He is the same God whom you read about it from Genesis 1 all the way to Revelation 22. I'm glad to know that I can depend on the God that 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.

**James 1:17 “...with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.”**

James says that he is the God and ruler, even of the sun and the moon. 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 of all, the Word of God doesn't change either. 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. It's as timely as this evening's newscast. You know, if men would give the Bible half a chance and some semblance of a fair hearing, they might just come to see how wonderfully relevant the Bible is today.

I believe that that Word of God has the ability to answer every moral and spiritual question that man can ask. People today claim that we've outgrown the Bible, and that in all of our learning and sophistication, we have left the Bible behind, as an antiquated book that just needs to be relegated to the dust heaps of history. It's not what the scriptures teach that we're interested in today. It's what the latest Gallup Poll says, or what society as a whole has decided about a particular matter. We no longer allow the Bible to determine the difference between right and wrong, and today, very few kinds of behaviors are looked upon in the world as being wrong or sinful. Think about it: we've justified everything today. Literally, we have justified EVERYTHING today. From adultery to pornography to homosexuality to abortion, and on and on and on the list could go...by throwing the Bible aside and doing what is right in our own eyes, to use an expression from the book of Judges (**Judges 21:25**). In fact, in the eyes of many people today, there really is no such thing as sin. They'll tell us that the Word of God is outdated, they twist the scriptures to justify what the Bible condemns as sinful and wrong. You know, the Bible teaches that fornication, drunkenness, adultery and homosexuality are sinful in the eyes of God. And if those things were wrong for the New Testament church, they're still wrong today—regardless of what the Supreme Court or the latest opinion poll says.

**I Peter 1:24-25 “...the grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: but the word of the Lord endureth for ever...”**

**Matthew 24:35 “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.”**

The Bible is still as relevant and true as it ever was; the problem is that men have rejected it. 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 chaos spiritually and morally. Look around! Watch the news tonight and see if we are not spiraling into an abyss of chaos and confusion. That's what happens when there is no such thing truth, when there is no standard. That's just as much the case when we reject the Word of God as it would be if society had no standard for weights and measurements, for example. Can you imagine trying to function as a society if we had no set standard to weigh or measure things by? What if we had no official rules for language or mathematics? What if everything was left up to every individual just to determine for him or herself? How would you like to shop at a grocery store where the butcher at the meat counter just made up his own measurements? Surely, you can see how much confusion and chaos would result from that! Why is it that we refuse to accept an absolute and unchanging standard when it comes to right and wrong, or

ethical, moral or religious issues? Friends, can't you see that's why the world is in the shape that it's in? Furthermore, it's why religion is in the mess that 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. 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 judged by what appears on its sacred pages. That standard is unchanging. Again, I for one am glad that I have a Bible to turn to today. I am glad that my spiritual and moral views don't have to be constantly reshaped because of the fact that 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.

Thirdly, the Lord's church is an unchanging institution. You know, the church is an ancient institution. We read of its beginning in **Acts 2**. The events of that chapter took place on a Sunday morning in Jerusalem about 1,980 years ago. And in the eyes of God, that institution and what it consists of and how it is structured, how He built and designed it, how He planned and brought it to pass—that institution that started back there so long ago has not changed in the eyes of God.

**Hebrews 12:28 "Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved..."**

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. There is something thrilling about that to me! It's an awesome thing to me to turn over to the book of Acts and read about the church that Jesus established almost 2,000 years ago and to KNOW that I am a member of that same institution! It humbles me, every time I come together with other Christians on the Lord's Day to break bread and to know that I'm keeping a tradition that was established two millennia ago and that has taken place every Sunday somewhere, some place since that time. Based on what the Bible tells us about the church of the first century, I believe with all of my heart that I'm a member of that same church! What I will do today, when I gather with fellow disciples, is in strict keeping with the pattern established by Christ and His apostles 2,000 years ago. By using only the scriptures as a guide, we can know exactly what they preached, how they lived, how they worshipped, and I can, in every point, follow that example. The problem today is this: 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 one is as different as the next, as daylight and dark. The reason is simple: people are not looking to the early church as a paradigm. They view the church as a fluid entity that changes along with the whims and feelings of man. Well, I believe that the church that Jesus established is an unchanging thing. Governments change over the years, nations rise and fall, societies may crumble, but there is one institution you can count on to be the same, and that is 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. 2,000 years ago, our Lord left this world. He gathered with His small band of disciples on Olive's 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:

**John 14:1-3 “Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.”**

You know, the skeptic makes fun of that. The infidel scoffs at that promise, and they’re proving the Bible to be true by doing so.

**II Peter 3: 3-4,8,10 “Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts. And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation...But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day...But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.”**

That promise may have been uttered from our Lord Jesus 2,000 years ago, but that promise remains. We are living 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, and I know one of these days, the Lord IS coming back. The Lord is going to make good on His promise. It is an unchanging thing in this rapidly changing world.