

What Is the Faith Once Delivered?

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Spiritual confusion is rampant among God's people. "Instruction" from multiple sources—contrary to previously learned doctrine—is commonplace. This has bewildered many. They are asking, "How can we be sure? What is the correct teaching for the New Testament Church of God?" What was "the faith once delivered?" Your peace of mind and eventual salvation hinge on correctly answering these questions. This article is vital to help you understand.

God's covenant people have always been bombarded by religious "teachers" bringing a "new truth," a "different gospel," a different Jesus, or even a perversion of the original teachings revealed by God. The New Testament is replete with warnings concerning apostasy! "... Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures, Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ" (Acts 17:2–3). Obviously, others were preaching a counterfeit Christ (II Cor. 11:4).

Again, Paul wrote, "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him [they could not 'remove from him' unless they were once correctly knowledgeable of him] that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ" (Gal. 1:6–7).

Peter warned, "But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of" (II Pet. 2:1–2).

John cautioned, "If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds" (II John 10–11). This is an obvious warning that someone would come to God's people with a perversion of the true Gospel. Jude made it plain. "Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ" (Jude 3–4).

There are many other Biblical examples of apostasy, such as a falling away from the Truth (II Thess. 2:1–3, 10–11). Doctrines of demons would be preached and enforced (I Tim. 4:1–3). Men who would lead away those weak in the faith (II Tim. 3:1–9). Called-out ones who would refuse to endure and who would desire men to teach contrary to what they had previously learned (II Tim. 4:3–4).

For That Time Only?

In every one of the above examples, it is plain that those who led others away or those who were being "carried about with every wind of doctrine" (Eph. 4:11–14) had once known the Truth! God had revealed His Truth to them! They were not deceived for multiple years, only thinking they had the Truth! They were not in spiritual darkness! They did not "progress" or evolve into the Truth through these heretical teachers! Quite the contrary they turned from what God had already taught them! "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold [suppress] the truth in unrighteousness; Because that which may be known of God is manifest in [margin: 'to'] them, for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God . . ." (Rom. 1:18–21).

Were these texts in God's Word for the apostolic church only? Are they to be ignored as not relevant for us today? Are only examples of Old Testament apostasy valid? (I Cor. 10:6, 11–12; Rom. 15:4). Are not New Testament examples equally valid? Are not these New Testament warnings applicable to the modern, end-time Church which Jesus built, the Church of which Jesus said, ". . . the gates of hell shall not prevail against it?" (Matt. 16:18). Jesus said His Church would exist to His Second Coming!

We must conclude the New Testament is written also for the end-time Church! (John 1:1, 14; Col. 1:26; Matt. 4:4). The church today is to believe and follow the same apostolic writings given to first-century believers. Otherwise, we have no source or basis for our conduct. We must acknowledge that the warnings of apostasy are equally applicable to the Church of God today! To believe otherwise is to arbitrarily select whatsoever seems right (Prov. 14:12). This is inconsistent with Scripture! (Luke 4 :4; Deut. 8:2–3).

What Do We Mean, "Faith Once Delivered"?

We should consider a definition of terms at this point. When the Bible speaks of "the faith once delivered," it is not talking about a "faith," which is trust and confidence in God. It is not discussing the ". . . substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen"

(Heb. 11:1). That kind of faith is what the just must live by and consistently exercise in their lives.

What the Bible means by the term "faith once delivered" is that embodiment of doctrine which *must* be revealed by God and substantiated by His Word. It includes the doctrine about faith, as well as the teaching or doctrines of repentance, baptism, Holy Spirit, salvation, and many other subjects. When Jude exhorts the Church to return to the faith once delivered to the saints, he is including the end-time Church's returning to the teachings (doctrines) originally given by Jesus Christ to the apostles and the prophets of old (Jude 3–4, 18).

This is why doctrine is so important! Do not let anyone deceive you otherwise. There are some who tell us doctrine is unimportant, that "a Christian is not converted to a set of doctrines! . . . We are saved through faith in Christ not through belief in this or that teaching. . . . Each generation of true Christians is led into new avenues of spiritual insight and understanding . . ." (*The Good News*, May 1976, "What Is the Spirit of Real Christianity?") You need to write for our article, *Doctrinal Changes—How They Affect You!*

If doctrine is so unimportant to the organization which publishes the above magazine, why have ministers been disfellowshipped from that organization for refusing to follow and teach recent doctrinal changes? With reference to this time, why did the apostle John exhort the brethren to beware of individuals or organizations who came teaching doctrines contrary to what was originally taught (II John 10–11)?

Are we seeing a fulfillment of these Biblical warnings? Are God's people asleep to the consequences? Did not Jesus warn that the Church would be slumbering and many would not be ready at His return? (Matthew 25:1–13; Matthew 7:13–14).

How Does the Church Receive Doctrinal Truth?

If God's Church is gradually led into greater understanding of Truth, does this mean doctrines of the Church change from time to time in the light of "new study?" This is what the Church is being told. (See *The Good News*, May 1976, "What Is the Spirit of Real Christianity?")

If the Church is gradually led into "new truth" which supplants "old truth," it naturally follows that current foundational teachings will change sometime in the future. With such consistent change, how can we be sure we will ever come to the absolute Truth, upon which we can totally rely and from which we will never depart? Since a valid baptism depends upon real repentance (which is based on knowledge), at what time does one rely on his knowledge as the basis for true repentance and baptism? After all, God gives His Holy

Spirit only to those who obey Him (Acts 5:32). If today's knowledge becomes tomorrow's error, when can a person truly repent? When can he be properly baptized and receive God's Spirit?

Such reasonings of men lead to this inescapable conclusion: If God did not reveal His Truth and if what we call "truth" is constantly subject to change, then the Church would always be heretical! It could never escape being apostate! Being apostate, it could never be God's Church!!

Can you base your salvation on that kind of shifting foundation? (Matt. 7:24–27).

On the other hand, if God's Church was given the Truth, how can we justify doctrinal changes? Acceptance of doctrinal changes means we must admit we were heretics either before the doctrinal changes or since the doctrinal changes! Which do you choose to believe? If we say we were heretics before the changes, then we must conclude that we were not, nor ever have been, His Church! Yet, if we say we have become heretics by changing, then we are admitting certain men have crept in "unawares" (Jude 3–4; II Pet. 1–3). In fact, this is exactly what has happened! We are commanded to withdraw! (Read our article, *True Christian Fellowship Today!*)

We must acknowledge that God's Church was given the essential knowledge of doctrinal truth! It was given through divine revelation from God (Deut. 29:29; Isa. 56:1; Matt. 11:25; Matt. 16:15–17; Rom. 1:17; I Cor. 2:10; Dan. 2:22; Gal. 1:11–12; Eph. 3:3). If we say we did not receive the necessary, unchanging, doctrinal Truth from God, we must deny God's power and the above-quoted scriptures! We may as well tear pages from His holy Word and quit making a pretense of our calling!

Specific Individuals Chosen

Some feel they have received authority from God to teach His Truth as a result of their personal study. While God gives those called the ability to understand doctrinal truth, the right to teach is quite another matter. The Bible warns of the danger of arrogating this responsibility (James 3:1). No one should assume this responsibility! One must have authority from God, proven by the fruits (II Cor. 12:12; II Cor. 13:3; I Cor. 9:2). He must be called of God (Heb. 5:4) and given a message which God reveals to him (Luke 4:18–19; I John 1:1–3; I John 2:24). Such an individual is a servant of God having authority to teach.

Scripture tells us, "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me" (John 6:44–45).

But how does one hear? How does one learn? By himself? God generally manifests His Word through preaching (Titus 1:3). Paul explains in the book of Romans that we come to a knowledge of the Truth and increase our faith through the preaching of one sent by God! (Rom. 10:13–17). Such a person is the messenger of the Lord of hosts (Mal. 2:7). He will not have assumed any special role. His call will have been the result of direct guidance of God's Holy Spirit. His credentials are not necessarily documents from schools for "religious training." Even if he is "learned," the basis of his commission is not scholarship. He will have been given a message—the divine oracles of God will be revealed to him—so he can teach others!

Scripture substantiates this. The example of the Apostle Paul makes it plain. He explains his background to Asian Jews who were in Jerusalem. "I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day" (Acts 22:3). He was religious! He was zealous! He was highly educated! Gamaliel was one of the most renowned religious teachers of the day (Acts 5:34). Paul obviously sat at his feet as an eager, rapt student. He applied himself.

But notice further.

Paul had to be called of God *out* of his "religious" activity. He was appointed (Acts 22:10), chosen (Acts 22:14); and he had to be sent (Acts 9:15). It was revealed to Paul what his message or doctrine should be. "But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ" (Gal. 1:11–12; Eph. 3:3).

Quite an admission! Paul plainly states that all his previous scholarship was of little value in understanding the Truth. The lectures of his famous teacher Gamaliel had to be put on the shelf. Paul counted them as less than nothing (Ph'p. 3:7–8). What Paul preached had to be revealed! He exhorted, "Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you" (Ph'p. 4: 9). The revealed doctrines Paul taught were the faith once delivered!

Revelation in Old Testament

The Scriptures of the Old Testament were written for us (Rom. 15:4). They not only give us hope; they teach us lessons. When God first created Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, He had to reveal knowledge (truth) to them. How could they know a certain tree was forbidden unless God said so? They had God's word for it, only. But when they defied God's revealed Truth, their eyes were opened! The result? They were cast out, just as God said.

Another example is Abraham. He was told to leave his country for ". . . a land that I will shew thee" (Gen. 12:1). God's Truth (teachings) had to be revealed to him (Gen. 26:5).

Israel, long in captivity, had forgotten the Sabbath. The miracle of the manna was to reveal God's Truth on the subject (Ex. 16). The Ten Commandments had to be revealed once again (Ex. 20).

The prophets of old were inspired as they were moved by the Holy Spirit (II Pet. 1:20–21). Daniel understood this (Dan. 2:22).

A prime example in the Old Testament is the matter of clean and unclean meats (Lev. 11; Deut. 14). It would be impossible to know certain meats are harmful to human beings unless God revealed that knowledge! Those who reject divine revelation as the source of the faith once delivered deny the truth about unclean meats. Many who once knew this are reverting to the practice of eating unclean things! They return, as the proverb says, like a dog to its vomit! In such matters as indicated above, is II Peter 2:20–22 applicable?

Altered in New Testament?

Some claim divine revelation is not essential for New Testament Christians. That since God has given us more information through the writers of the New Testament, revelation is not necessary. Now, it is claimed, "scholarship" is the basis for understanding Truth.

Are such claims true?

Can we come to understand the true teachings of the Bible by our own efforts alone? If such be the case, why do not the "learned theologians" all agree with one another? Why do we have countless churches, sects, and schisms, all with differing opinions as to what constitutes Truth? Why do we see—even in God's Church—numerous schisms of differing opinions among those "scholars" who have rejected the revelation God gave to His Church? Be sure to write for our article, *How Do Christians Come to a Knowledge of the Truth?*

Why does the Bible tell us God hides knowledge and understanding from the "wise" (scholars)? That He reveals Truth to "babes?" (Matt. 11:25). That eyes are blinded, ears stopped, understanding blocked until God reveals it? (I Cor 2:9–10).

When we look at the lives of God's servants, the Bible makes it plain that God never altered His method of revealing His Truth. In Old Testament times as well as New Testament times, He always has given His Truth by *revelation*.

Modern End-Time Different?

The veracity and continuity of revealed truth is not contingent upon man's remaining faithful (Rom. 3:3–4). God thunders He does not change! (Malachi 3:6). Jesus Christ is always the same (Heb. 13:8). There is no variableness, neither shadow of turning, in any respect—including doctrine (Jas. 1:17).

And, if God revealed the Truth, it is obvious the Church has now departed as a result of recent doctrinal changes. It is now apostate! If God did not reveal the Truth to His Church, He has changed His method of making Truth known and is not consistent. He has abandoned "His Church"—leaving it to blindly grope in quest of "the truth." Indeed, as Paul said, it is "Ever learning [scholarship], and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth" (II Tim. 3:7). If the doctrines the Church followed were wrong, it was not God's Church! We all have been deluded by Satan, and our baptisms are invalid. We did not have proper knowledge to repent! Our faith has been in vain!

If, through "scholarship," the Church is now correct concerning the "new" doctrines, can we be sure that in the future church scholars will not again find "error" and change? One becomes nonplussed over such absurdities!

As every knowledgeable student of the Bible knows, there are many prophetic references indicating a revelation of doctrinal Truth in modern times (Isa. 28:9–13; Jer. 6:9–10). Why should it be so difficult to accept revelation given by God in the early days of the end-time Church?

Jesus said His Church would *always* be in existence (Matt. 16:18). There would be times when the Church seemed to pass from existence as though ready to die (Rev. 2, 3). But in every case, there would always remain a few loyal members who would cling to the Truth, even when the overall Body embraced false doctrine. God inevitably raised up individuals to fan the fires of Truth and rekindle the lamp of Israel just as He did in the case of Eli and Samuel.

What Was "the Faith Once Delivered"?

It is now argued that since some churches have proper knowledge about baptism and others have the truth about the Sabbath, we cannot say they received this knowledge by revelation. On the contrary, God revealed to His Church, in past ages, these inexorable truths. What happened is, men have "chosen" only what appealed to them, rather than accepting the totality of God's revealed Truth of the way to the Kingdom of God. This is why so many churches today have some points of truth. It is possible to have all the Truth of God except one point and yet not be acceptable to God (Jas. 2:10).

The "faith once delivered" must include knowledge of man's inadequacy in relationship to God and how to overcome that inadequacy. It must reveal what God is and what man is to become. It must give instruction regarding what man must do to gain that purpose. That instruction is the revealed truth concerning repentance, baptism, receiving the Holy Spirit, spiritual growth, enduring to the end, and personal overcoming. It must reveal the basis of character, the foundational precepts of God's Law, and obedience to every word of God. These include the Sabbath, the Holy Days, the Ten Commandments, and the judgments and precepts of God. For a fuller explanation of "the faith once delivered," write for our article, *How Do Christians Come to a Knowledge of the Truth?*

Those who argue that anyone can come to an understanding of these foundational precepts through "scholarship" must answer Christ's statement, ". . . verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them (Matt. 13:17). And Peter wrote, "Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: Searching what [by careful scholarship?], or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified before hand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves [they couldn't understand], but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into" (I Pet. 1:10–12).

How plain! Even the holy prophets could not understand, though they searched (Scripture). It was not revealed to them. Just as we cannot understand Truth unless God reveals to us "the faith once delivered!" (I Cor. 2:9–10).

Peter continues: "Wherefore, gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end. . . . As obedient children . . ." (I Pet. 1:13–14).

Can we not see by the fruits of recent changes, confusion has been the result? Never before have so many been bewildered and confused. Never before have so many fallen away from the Truth while at the same time giving lip service to God! (II Thess. 2:3, 10–12; Titus 1:16; Matt. 7:21–23; and Jer. 16:10–13).

Revealed Doctrine Change?

Search as you may, there is not one example of divinely revealed doctrines ever being changed to "new truth." God thunders that He does not change (Mal. 3:6). Even though God has changed His mind concerning His intent to punish, effected necessary transitional changes from Old to New Covenant, and precipitated necessary administrative changes, He

has *never* changed His doctrine or way of life! And He has *never* given authority to make changes in doctrinal matters.

Daniel reveals, however, that someone would attempt to do so (Dan. 7:25). A true Christian is told, ". . . meddle not with them that are given to change" (Prov. 24:21). Obviously, this is not talking about the overcoming (change) a Christian must accomplish, but does include one who is departing from the Truth. (Write for our article, *True Christian Fellowship Today*).

Can we honestly say that doctrine should ever change because of permissiveness and "modern circumstances?" Isn't that admitting a lowering of God's high standard to allow for a contrary lifestyle? There are many grave warnings to a ministry who would teach such things. (Read our article, *What Does the Bible Teach About Change?*)

We must conclude that if the Truth is indeed genuine, it is permanent—it does not change! Therefore, the basis of character will always remain the same. Otherwise, God is a respecter of persons, demanding a high standard for some and a lower standard for others.

Jesus came to magnify that standard. He did not come to abolish or lower that standard which He had already revealed. Therefore, man has no authority to change or water-down the standard of God.

May God help you, brethren, to comprehend your great calling of God so that apostasy will not destroy you. Peter warned, ". . . beloved, seeing ye know these things before, BEWARE lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness" (II Pet. 3:17).

God's people may forget God, but God will never forget them. "Remember these, O Jacob and Israel; for thou art my servant: I have formed thee; thou art my servant: O Israel, thou shalt not be forgotten of me." And God exhorts, ". . . return unto me . . ." (Isa. 44:21–22). Will you return to your God? Will you "hold fast" to "the faith once delivered?" May God give you the necessary determination!