

What Does the Bible Teach About Change?

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We on the staff of Church of God, The Eternal, have received numerous inquiries about the doctrinal changes which have taken place within the Worldwide Church of God. We are asked why we refuse to change along with the Church—why we won't accept CHANGE. The following article explains the reasons.

Numerous changes in doctrine, policy, and tradition have occurred within God's Church since the original revelation of truth in this age. Other changes in doctrine continue to transpire. While it was taught, in past years, that God never changes—that doctrines are absolute and members must be resolute in faith—the opposite is taught today. The membership is asked to believe and accept the following concepts: 1) God *does* allow for changes in doctrine. 2) He left His Church in error for years. 3) Doctrinal truth is progressive. 4) As modern scholarship techniques are developed, our understanding of doctrinal truth can and probably will also change—perhaps never coming to absolute truth that is unalterable.

Members who did not accept the first changes in the 1970s were told they were being rebellious toward God and His government. Those who refused to change with the Church, it was taught, had no hope of eternal life—there was no salvation unless one remained within the body of the Worldwide Church of God. The leadership in Pasadena issued public disclaimers to such beliefs, but in private these teachings were absolute. And many fear-tactic sermons were preached to this effect, from the Church's pulpits around the world, to prevent a mass exodus of its troubled members.

Many members of the Worldwide Church of God were sobered at the multitude of doctrines which were changed, altered, or even dropped altogether. But they feared to ask serious or meaningful questions about obvious Scriptural contradictions within the "new" doctrines, lest they be branded heretical and put out of the Church. They were taught the false concept that there is no other group obeying God, and therefore no place to turn. Consequently, most of these spiritually troubled people continued to attend for a time, sitting through continual shock waves as one after another of the cherished doctrinal beliefs tumbled like bowling pins. Now, almost three decades since those initial changes began, that original body has preserved virtually none of its original teachings.

The changes were almost endless. Some of the major doctrinal changes that first weakened the foundation of the Church concerned divorce and remarriage, divine healing, and the proper day on which to observe Pentecost. One can only sit back in wide-eyed astonishment that such changes have transpired with the Body of Jesus Christ!

It was taught that, by these changes, God is leading His Church out of a spiritual wilderness and relieving His people from the "oppressive" doctrines of the past. Since the Scriptures were interpreted to show these changes as "relief," the ministers then became "helpers of their joy." Some of the very first changes were as follows:

- 1) The manner in which we are to observe the Sabbath and Holy Days was liberalized. Entertainment and pleasure-seeking on the Sabbath were now a way of life for many.
- 2) The land Sabbath was said to be optional.
- 3) Long hair for men, makeup for women, and birthday parties for children were given ministerial approval.
- 4) Interracial dating—and consequent marriage—now carried no spiritual censure by the Church.
- 5) Gambling was proclaimed to be honorable before God. The reasoning was: Since God gives us everything for nothing, it is all right for us to get something for nothing.
- 6) The promise of a "place of safety" was no longer a reality for the Church.
- 7) Passover could be observed on either the 14th or the 15th of Nisan.
- 8) The unconverted public began to be invited to church services.
- 9) Entertainment (big-name "stars") began to be used as a drawing card for festival attendance.
- 10) The emphasis was on "play" rather than "pray."
- 11) Children were allowed and encouraged to do "their thing."
- 12) Prayer and study were no longer emphasized as necessary on a day-by-day basis.
- 13) We were told we should expect a Christian to occasionally get in a bad attitude and sin before God.
- 14) Holidays of the world began to be observed, in order to avoid offending the community.
- 15) Smoking began to be practiced by some leaders.

16) Eating unclean meat was also practiced by some members.

17) Lying and bearing false witness were no longer considered essentially the same. One is permitted to "lie" to protect himself, as long as he does not bear false witness against his neighbor. The concept was taught in Bible classes at Ambassador College. And this same teaching was sent to the field ministry via cassette tapes, as part of the "educational service" to the ministry.

18) Other areas of doctrinal and traditional belief in which alterations occurred included prophecy, the identity of Israel, tithing, and fasting with prayer to determine God's will for an ordination.

What Do We Mean—Change?

Make no mistake about it: The Bible emphatically records changes of individuals, nations, and even God. Some of these changes have been for good and some for evil.

A text in Ezekiel, chapter eighteen, illustrates the difference between good and evil changes. Verses 21–22 state: ". . . if the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die. All his transgressions that he hath committed, they shall not be mentioned unto him: in his righteousness that he hath done he shall live." Thus, when a man changes his sinful ways to righteous obedience toward God, that change is good! But notice verse 24, ". . . when the righteous turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and doeth according to all the abominations that the wicked man doeth, shall he live? All his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned: in his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die." If a righteous man turns from his obedience to God—and turns to a licentious and permissive lifestyle—that change is bad!

When we speak of change, we are speaking of change which can or should be made in man's character. And obviously, not all change is good. One must be careful not to assume all change is improvement.

Also, when speaking of change, we must not confuse character change with doctrinal change. There is a world of difference between the two. Once we establish, through God's revelation, what truth is, we must hold it fast and never change it. Rather, we must change ourselves—our character—to conform to that doctrinal truth which was revealed. Then, we shall "surely live." But if we change doctrine (depart from revealed doctrinal truth) to substantiate sinful lifestyles, we shall surely die!

God has given us free moral agency to decide whether we obey what He revealed. He has not given us the right to obey only what fits our whims and lifestyles, or what seems right to us (Proverbs 14:12). Study Deuteronomy 30:15–20 where free moral agency is clearly explained. Free moral agency presupposes that mankind is able to understand, by the way of salvation, what God reveals—and that he is capable of attaining to the doctrinal standard which never changes. Deuteronomy 29:29 says, ". . . those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law."

God revealed WHAT. We must decide WHETHER. When we have lived contrary to the "what" all our lives, it is obvious we need relief. God's method of relief is to call us to a knowledge of His revealed Truth (doctrine) and, through the help of His Holy Spirit, begin a process involving the change of our character to meet the high standards of that revealed truth.

Yet, some say, "I can't live that way. It's too hard." Thus, the Bible reveals, many are willing to water down God's Truth in order to obtain "relief." But God says, "For this commandment which I command you this day is not too hard for you . . ."—". . . not beyond your power, it is not beyond your reach . . ." (Deuteronomy 30:11, *Revised Standard Version* and *Moffatt* translation). God does not water down His truth to give "relief." He lifts man upward to conform to His unchanging way of life. That is real and lasting relief!

Biblical Examples of Change

The apostle Paul wrote, under the inspiration of God, "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope" (Romans 15:4). Therefore, much insight or understanding can be gleaned from a careful scrutiny of the individual and national examples recorded—both good and bad examples.

In the antediluvian world God revealed His laws, judgments, and statutes. He told them *what*. He told them *how*. From the Garden of Eden to the days of Noah, most men changed—but not for the good or the better, only for the worse. There were pitifully few who were willing to walk in God's way of life. But the time of Noah, all humanity (except Noah) had degenerated—changed to a sinful departure from the truth. ". . . God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Genesis 6:5). Again, "The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence" (Genesis 6:11).

Here is a recorded change—but it was a bad change. Notice, however, that God did not change His standards—the doctrinal truths based on his laws. Rather, He destroyed those who departed from the truth!

Jesus promised it would be the same at His Second Coming (Matthew 24:37–39). Only a few would remain faithful (Matthew 7:14, Luke 18:8). Is it any wonder there are some many admonitions to the people of God to "hold fast?"

Time would fail us to record the seemingly endless examples of "change" recorded in the Bible. Abraham, Sodom and Gomorrah, the Tower of Babel, David's numbering of Israel, Rahab, and the apostle Paul are meaningful examples of changes toward bad or good. We can even read of God repenting—changing His mind (Exodus 32:14)

But, in not one single instance can we read where God authorized changes in His doctrines!

We read where man changed—sometimes from bad to good, and other times from good to bad. These changes were made either to meet God's never-failing standards, or to degenerate and depart from them

Why We Should Change

At this point we should ask, ". . . What is man, that thou art mindful of him? or the son of man, that thou visitest him?" (Hebrews 2:6). Suffice it to briefly say, in this article, that man has the *potential* to be born into the family of God (see I John 3:1–3). That is man's ultimate destiny if he qualifies—if he overcomes his carnal nature, which is sinful and which carnally desires to depart from God's revealed way of life. For a fuller explanation of man's future destiny, write for our article, *What is the Work of God?*

Man, separated from God *is* sinful (Jeremiah 10:23–24; 17:9, Romans 3:10–18; 8:7). He naturally follows that which seems right to human reasoning (Proverbs 16:25). This reasoning will lead to ultimate destruction.

Therefore, man needs to change. He needs to conquer, with the help of God's Holy Spirit, the sinful habits and ways to which his own nature is inclined. This change is for man's good and will aid him in reaching the scale of perfection found in God's Law—God's doctrines.

Again, it must be remembered that God does not lower His standard of truth to allow man to pursue a sinful lifestyle. Instead, man must seek the help of God's Spirit and thereby come up to God's standards that are never-failing, never-changing! I CHANGE NOT, thunders God (Malachi 3:6).

Why We Should NOT Change

Once God has revealed His truth to man, and the understanding of that truth has been substantiated through individual study (study of the Bible and related data), should man ever change? What happens to a Christian within God's Church when wrong change occurs?

First of all, such a person begins a rapid spiritual decline. He inevitably returns to what he was before God called him—he again lacks godly character and personality. This is described in 2 Peter 2:20–22. "For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire." (For a broader explanation of the principles involved in Peter's statement, write for our article entitled *Doctrinal Changes—How They Affect You!*).

Backsliding occurs. A person is no longer under God's grace. But forgiveness can be granted only after one repents—changes. That, when the person once again reaches up for the doctrinal truths of God, which are absolute and never-changing.

Second, when a person rejects revealed truth (makes ungodly changes), he begins to thwart the very purpose for which God placed him on the earth. He begins to fail his intended destiny. He no longer is qualifying to rule in the Kingdom of God. He cannot be born into God's family.

Last, such an individual will come directly under Satanic influence. The devices of the Devil are subtle indeed (2 Corinthians 2:10–11). An ungodly change in just one basic doctrinal area is sufficient to bring to pass a departure from revealed truth. If the Devil can influence one change (James 2:10, Ephesians 6:11–12), he knows it will be only a matter of time before a person ceases to obey God.

The latter is especially true in the matter of the proper day on which to observe Pentecost (which symbolically represents the coming of God's Holy Spirit to aid and beget man). If the wrong day is observed, it is only a matter of time until a departure will occur in other areas. This, in fact, has happened to God's people.

Many have forgotten the admonition, "Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand" (Ephesians 6:13). Jesus said we should pray for deliverance from the evil one (Matthew 6:13). We are warned to be sober and vigilant, concerning our approach to God's way of life (1 Peter 5:8).

Why this warning? Because the Devil will attempt to persuade us to wrongfully change our doctrinal convictions—to give up or render ineffective the originally revealed doctrines. The alert and well-informed are aware of the vast changes which have occurred over many years in the Worldwide Church of God.

Some of these changes were not initially "official." That is, no formal announcements were made. As Peter explains, they are "private heresies" (2 Peter 2:1–3). However, when no objections came from a slumbering, deceived ministry—and no protests were registered from a cowering, subjugated people—then formal announcements followed, and the departure from truth became open.

Since the first seemingly insignificant changes in doctrine in the 1970s, virtually all of that original revelation has now been refuted. And when men change God's Truth to satisfy their own lusts and lifestyles, the Body of Christ is destined for endless suffering and eventual oppression. History teaches that those leaders who are the most libertine will become the most inflexible dictators.

Remember Absalom?

In the absence of David, his father, Absalom subtly influenced the people to rebel against King David. He promised "relief" if only they would look to him as the new leader. But when he had achieved the overthrow of David, his libertine promises became meaningless. He committed sexual promiscuity in the sight of all the people. And the people, rather than reproving Absalom and rejecting his leadership, turned their heads.

In modern times, the same parallel has happened to the people of God. How different from the Apostle Paul, who said, "Those things, which ye have both learned [in the past], and received [truths], and heard [traditional teachings and judgments], and seen in me [personal, righteous examples], *do*: and the God of peace shall be with you" (Philippians 4:9).

Yes, God's people are commanded to hold fast to that which was revealed. How can one hold fast to past teaching and yet accept present changes?

Change Is Not Always Synonymous With Growth!

It is easy to be deceived. Satan has deceived everyone, at one time or another (Revelation 12:9). Jesus warned His followers to take heed, lest they be deceived (Matthew 24:4). Nevertheless even with such strong Bible admonitions God's people were taught that once they were called, they could no longer be deceived. (Ask for our article, *Can True Christians Be Deceived?*). Thus, instead of looking at ourselves—our leadership, our practices, our traditions, our policies, and the changing of God's revealed doctrines—we

were kept busy suspecting those outside the church. We were admonished to watch world news, with special emphasis on prophecy. There was supposedly no need to look within, because the leaders were "closer" to God and, having God's mind, would always be corrected by Christ if they strayed or began to depart from God's revealed truth.

Whenever the Worldwide Church of God leadership made a change in doctrine or policy, they loudly proclaimed that "Christ is leading His Church," or referred to the incident as "the cocking of the gun." Therefore, any change or decision rendered by Headquarters was believed to be in the best interest of the church. A great deal of assumption took place. Most made this near-fatal mistake of assuming every change to be good.

Had we only looked to God's Word and applied it to ourselves, we would have been forced to ask, "What has been the fruits of these changes?" (Matthew 7:16, 20). "Did these changes result in spiritual growth in the lives of individuals?" In most cases, doctrinal changes resulted in making allowances for human failure. These changes lowered God's standards for the leadership and members, making allowances for the flesh.

So, do not be misled into believing that change is always good. Sometimes, change is heretical, the penalty being death. This kind of change is apostasy and departure from truth. The Truth is the high standard of God—the doctrine based on His holy laws and commandments.

If a change makes allowance for sinful situations, if God's holy, revealed doctrine is changed or watered down to justify sinful lifestyles, or to make it easier for individuals to "come into the church," then one can be sure the change is apostasy—a departure from truth. The validity of such changes cannot be proven honestly from the Bible.

Hold Fast the Revealed Truth

Can a person "hold fast" if he never had the Truth in the first place? If the Worldwide Church of God had the correct doctrinal truth for forty years, we must conclude it has apostatized, since it has changed its doctrines. On the other hand, if it has only recently come to a correct doctrinal understanding, we must conclude it was not God's Church at all, for God left it in the spiritual wilderness. If that is the case God's Spirit did not guide the church into all truth as Jesus promised (John 16:13, Jeremiah 2:31).

If God did not reveal the true doctrines to the Worldwide Church of God, many older members died in vain. Those previously baptized did not have a proper knowledge of the truth and could not have repented. Their baptisms were not valid, if this were true. But, we know better than this.

However, can those who have accepted the doctrinal changes be sure these "new doctrines" are now absolute, never again to be changed? Are the changes inspired of God? The Doctrinal Committee admitted its studies on the Pentecost issue were not inspired by God. ("Pentecost Study Material," introductory letter by Charles V. Dorothy, April 22, 1974).

Unless we believe that God revealed the unalterable truth to His end-time servant—through whom we in turn received it—we can conclude only one of two things. Either 1) we were never the true Church of God, or 2) there is no such thing as unalterable truth. While divine truth never changes, we can never be sure what is now called truth will remain truth.

We in the Church of God, the Eternal, refuse to make any of these unscriptural changes, because we believe God's Church was given the truth. We believe the fruits proved that fact until apostasy occurred. We are resolved and determined to hold fast that which was revealed originally and proven reliable. It was not only proven by the fruits, but also substantiated by God's Word. This is why we refuse to change, or to approve the current teaching of the Worldwide Church of God.

This does not mean there is no opportunity for growth in our knowledge and understanding of God's way. We are admonished to ". . . grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. . . ." (2 Peter 3:18). But this kind of growth never contradicts that which was already delivered as truth. When a tree grows, its trunk and roots stay in place, while its branches are expanded upon the original foundation. The concept of growth taught by those who have forsaken God is to uproot the tree and transplant it in a new location. This is not godly growth. The true body of Christ, the church, is a living, growing entity, but new understanding given to approved and faithful servants will never refute the perfection of Christ, the Word, already received.