

Considering Change **10-04-20**

Part One: The Nature of God, Man and Change

Psalm 90 is a unique Psalm. It is authored by Moses, making it the oldest of the Psalms. It is about time, and God's absence from it, and its impact on man. Moses makes a unique statement about God: He exists apart from time: *Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever You had formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God.*

Our understanding of God's existence and eternity is that eternity is distinct from time, which seems to have begun in Genesis 1:1. Since God is separate from time, there are certain characteristics about God that can be deduced from this, and are supported by Scriptures. He is unchanging (Malachi 3:6); His Word does not change (1 Peter 1:24); He forgets nothing (Isaiah 49:15); His purposes are eternal (Ephesians 3:11). God's will for us is unchanged. His desire for our salvation does not change. The means of our judgment remains the same. Our need to be following His eternal purpose remains.

But this is not true of man. Man's nature IS to change. Biologically in growing up and old. Spiritually in repenting from sin and worldliness as well as spiritually maturing. Indeed, our circumstances are constantly changing. Perhaps this is one of the great differences between God and Man. This is Man's Dilemma: To be able to adapt to change while conforming to an unchanging God.

There are times where we see that need to adapt in the New Testament. For example, in Acts 8:1,4 we read about the persecution of the church. When the church in Jerusalem was assaulted, it required many changes. Changes of worship venues; no doubt they could no longer meet as a large group openly. This probably led to a distribution of the church into local churches as mentioned in Gal. 1:22. Later, a major change came in Acts 11:22-26 when Gentiles were added to the church. Once more, dramatic changes occurred.

Conclusion: Man changes, God does not. We need to know how to deal with change in a manner that reflects our devotion to God.

Part II: Changes in 2020

Covid 19 has brought a lot of changes to our lives. It has also forced our congregation to change. This brought to us a number of challenges:

1. Can we adapt within our authority?
2. Will we stand up to worship God?
3. Can we maintain unity and peace?
4. How will we move forward?

First, we need to understand what can change and what cannot change. This is a matter of authority. It requires us to discern what is tradition and what is required. We have many authorized traditions, generic authority to accomplish the purposes of God. For example, we must meet on the first day of the week as a single body to partake of the Lord's Supper, composed of two specific emblems (Acts 20:7, 1 Cor. 11:18-20, Mark 14:22-23). Our authorized tradition/generic authority in this matter relate to times and locations of services on Sunday or means of distributing communion. We must study the word; our generic authority is the methods of Bible study.

But we must discern too what cannot change. This is our specific authority. This is meeting together on the first day as one body. This is the pursuit of the purposes of the church. Dealing With change requires remaining committed to that which is specified while adapting that which can authoritatively be changed.

Second, we need to balance our obligation to submit to governing authorities and do what is right in the sight of men (Rom. 13:1-6, Rom 12:17). Sometimes man's views and rules conflict with God's rules. We see this in places such as Acts 5:27-29 and Acts 19:25-27. Worship is a necessity and law of God; we must continue to worship regardless of men while doing our best to submit to the rules of men. This requires a courage to be different, a courage to be blasphemed and called evil, and a courage to face oppression. If we must break the rules of men, it is only done as a last resort, and only because we must obey God first.

Third, changes strain our need for unity and peace. In Galatians 5:13-16 Paul said that we must use our Christian Liberty to serve one another. Christian Liberty is the ability to give something up for another. Paul stated that he would use his liberty not to eat meat if it violated the conscience of others. Right now we are wearing masks in our services. Most of us hate doing so, and many of us feel it is problematic and unnecessary. But we do so, because there are some who feel it is better. It is not a matter of faith or doctrine, so it is a matter of liberty. We all wear masks because we desire to be at peace and unity. Our circumstances have required us to sit in different locations and meet in unorthodox ways. This is all in order to accomplish the purposes of God for the local church, and we submit for the sake of unity and peace.

Lots of unusual choices have been made. Many of us have opinions and views that other choices could or should have been made. But we are pursuing peace. Paul states the importance of this in Romans 14:19. It means knowing the value of our opinions and understanding the time for criticism is often not in the heat of the moment. Working through change unified in love with one mind and one purpose accomplishes the holiness of the local church.

Fourth, what changes are still in the future? Our direction as a church has determined that some aspects of our church purposes will return. Right now we are not meeting for Bible classes in person; we will change that this week. We are not meeting as groups; we want that to change as soon as possible. We want to add more content to our worship assembly. These changes (authorized traditions) are hoped to be temporary. But what about changes that may be permanent? What if we continue having online Bible studies? What if we continue only having services on Sunday morning? These too are authorized traditions that might not change. The future will continue to test us in our ability to stand firm and to continue in unity and peace

Conclusion: We must all determine that we will face changes according to the authority of Christ and mindful of what is required to God. We must be courageous in growing animosity from the world while determined to have peace and unity within. Finally, we need to be ready to change again as needed.