

Coping with Change

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Introduction.

- A. As just about all of us instinctively realize, nothing stays the same forever, either for good or for bad. In this congregation recently, however, it seems like the pace of change has accelerated. Many of those changes have been good. It is truly wonderful that whereas last month, we had no deacons, this month, we have five. It is equally wonderful that Chip Copley was baptized about ten days ago, and also that we have a number of folks who are seriously considering identifying themselves with this congregation.
- B. Of course, not all of the changes have been things we were glad to see. It seems like every time I turn around, someone is leaving or talking about leaving. Deb got married and moved to Alabama, Dave and Karan are gone to Indiana, Rich and Brenda and their kids are worshiping at Lockport now, and in just a few weeks, Bob is headed to Arkansas. Now, I'm thankful that all of these partings have been on the best of terms, but that's a lot of folks, folks! These are not Christians in name only we're talking about, either. They were some of the core members here, and in the months and years to come, we will miss them.
- C. In times of change like these, it's important to remember that not everything is as unstable as it appears. The most important things are things that don't change, and we can trust in and rely on those things, even when everything else is in flux. Let's look at some of these eternal things this morning, and what our response to them should be, as we turn to God's word for help in coping with change.

I. Four Things that Do Not Change.

- A. As we examine this topic, we need to begin by highlighting four things in the spiritual realm that do not change. The first of these four things is **GOD** Himself. The prophet Malachi emphasizes this in Malachi 3:6. There are two main things that jump out at me from this verse. First, it shows just how wrongheaded those people are who try to invent their own version of God. They don't like the "mean" God of the Bible who is just and punishes sin, so instead, they believe in a "nice" God who just slobbers unconditional love all over us. That's just not the way things work, friends. People change, yes. I'm certainly not the same man I was ten years ago, or even five years ago. God, on the other hand, is exactly the same as He was five THOUSAND years ago. There's no room for change in perfection, and if we want God to change, we'll be disappointed.
- B. Second, though, let's pay attention to what this verse describes as the consequence of God not changing. It is precisely because God does not change that we are not consumed. God is not some spineless wimp who lets us do whatever we want, but it is equally true that all of us are alive today because of His constant and unfailing mercy. What we deserve is death, folks. Everything above that is a gift from God, and we need to be thankful for it. Every day when the sun rises, that's because of God's mercy. Every meal we eat, every lungful of air we breathe, we receive because of His lovingkindness. He doesn't have to give us those things. He is completely within His rights to squash us all like bugs in the next five minutes. But He doesn't, because He doesn't change, and that means that all of us can live in reliance on His grace.
- C. Because God does not change, it is also true that **GOD'S WORD** does not change. Peter makes this point in 1 Peter 1:23-25. Once again, there are several applications that we need to draw from this. First of all, because God's word as it was once for all delivered to the saints does not change, that means that we can dismiss so-called "holy books" from the Koran to the Book of Mormon out of hand. They try to rewrite God's will, and that cannot be. This also teaches us, though, that God's law is just as binding on us today as it was when it was first written. This is also not a popular thought. We live in a very sinful, very permissive society, and there are plenty of folks around us who want us to believe that everything from drunkenness to adultery to homosexuality is really OK. They want us to sweep the word of God under the carpet and ignore it. Brethren, we can't do that. Sure, the world can say that the word is irrelevant and outdated all they want, but saying doesn't make it so. The day will come when everyone, from devout Christian to confirmed scoffer, will be gathered before the great throne of God, and on that day, the word of God will be the standard by which every one of us is judged. That means that to our lives on earth, there is nothing MORE relevant than the word of God. We need to hear and follow what it says, and we disobey only at peril of our souls.
- D. Thankfully, though, in addition to the word, **GOD'S SALVATION** does not change. Look at how it is described in Hebrews 5:7-9. As we consider this salvation, though, we must first recognize what this passage tells us about its source. It is a salvation that is only available through Jesus. The road to heaven leads through the Lord, folks, and that's it. If we want to go to heaven, we must be disciples of Jesus. Once we understand that, we can also grasp that this salvation is eternal in its duration in our lives. As long as we keep close to God, the grace that we have received through Jesus doesn't have an expiration date. It doesn't wear out. It doesn't only work for people who are better than we are. It works for all of us, and it's enough to get us to heaven as long as we keep striving to do what is right.

- E. Even beyond this, one last thing that does not change is **GOD'S REWARD**. Let's see how this reward is described in 2 Corinthians 5:1. Just on the surface of this verse, I find it very appealing. I have spent the last two months of my life learning that earthly houses are NOT eternal. The house I bought was not in that bad a shape, and yet, even after working for hundreds of hours on it, I still have a to-do list as long as my arm. When I mention that, many of you say reassuring things like, "Don't worry about it; you'll never get it all done." In this context, I find it very relieving that I won't have to spend eternity in heaven installing Pergo.
- F. Of course, Paul isn't really talking about actual houses here. He's talking about our bodies and our lives: the temporary tent that we have here on earth, and the eternal house that we will have in heaven. It's sad but true, folks, that the bodies we're born with aren't going to last forever. I suspect that some of you older folks can testify to that much better than I can, as you get past what my dad likes to call the 70-year warranty period. Have I got good news for you! Once we get to heaven, none of us will have to deal with that. There will be no bum hearts in heaven, no bad hips, no gimpy shoulders, and perhaps best of all, no doctors with no idea what to do. Our spiritual bodies will go for a million years and only be scratching the surface of what they're good for. And better still, we'll get to spend all that time with Jesus. That's God's reward.

II. Four Things We Must Not Change.

- A. Of course, not everything in the spiritual realm is as enduring as those things that are ordained by God. They are within our human power, and that means that they are subject to our human whims. Nonetheless, they are four things we must not change, for the sake of our souls. Because God is steadfast in what He does, we must be steadfast in what we do. The first of these four things is **OUR COMMITMENT** to God. Let's see what the Hebrews writer has to say on this subject in Hebrews 6:11-12. The point is, friends, that there is nothing to be gained by falling away, and there is everything to be gained by remaining faithful.
- B. When you get right down to it, going to heaven is a very simple thing to do. We just have to believe in God's promises, act in accordance with those promises, and be steadfast until the Lord's return. Sometimes the devil tries to beat us up by convincing us that we will never be good enough to please God, but that's not the point. Christ has already been good enough in our place. Sometimes, we hit spiritual lows, where we feel like we're just barely hanging on. At times like those, we have to keep hanging on, because that's what God requires.
- C. Second, we must not change **OUR WORK** for God. This is not necessarily an easy thing to do for us, especially right now. As we mentioned earlier, these departed folks have left a lot of holes to fill. There are a lot of things they used to do that now we need to do: everything from teaching classes to leading singing. It's up to each one of us now to cowboy up and commit to working for this church, even when it's time-consuming or repetitive or hard. If we do that, God has a promise for us, and we see that promise revealed in 1 Corinthians 15:58. All the work that we put into this congregation, all the work that we feel is pointless or underappreciated or ignored, in reality is anything but. God sees. God knows. God cares, even if no one else does. Our toil for Him is not in vain, and it can never be in vain unless we stop working. Let's remember that, friends, the next time we wonder why we're putting all of this work in. We're going through this spiritual work to receive a spiritual reward, and that reward will be greater than any of us can imagine. We might think we're underpaid here, but I guarantee you that in heaven, no one will demand a raise.
- D. In addition to continuing to work, we must continue in **OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS**. Let's take a look at Peter's discussion of this in 1 Peter 5:8-9. In the specific context, Peter is making a point about the temptations posed by suffering, but this same principle applies to temptation generally. The devil might be evil, but he's good at what he does, and persistence is one of the favorite tools in his toolbox. His hope is to wear us down, knowing that even though we resist the first temptation, we might not resist the fiftieth.
- E. The only response to this Satanic persistence is to be just as persistent ourselves. We have to keep saying no to the devil for as long as it takes. We can't get tired. We can't give up, because once we do, he'll get us. Let's all pay special attention to this this week. Let's be honest—all of us know where the devil is going to be persistent in our lives, even if no one else does. Let's all take some steps, then, to persistently resist that persistent temptation. There are a number of ways we can do this. We can act to remove the source of the temptation from our lives. We can confide in a brother or sister and receive their help. It doesn't matter what it is, but let's do something, so that in our lives, we can maintain the righteousness God wants to see.
- F. Finally, let's be sure to continue in **OUR LOVE FOR BRETHREN**. The Hebrews writer says this in as many words in Hebrews 13:1. This too can be a challenge right now. If we haven't been here very long, or we were particularly close to some of the folks who left, there can be a real temptation to hold ourselves apart from this congregation. Conversely, if we're in neither of those situations, there can be a real temptation to stick with our old friends and ignore the brethren who aren't as blessed. Friends, we just can't do that. This church is not a random collection of individuals. We're a unit. We're the household of God, and we need to make sure that everyone who comes through these doors is welcomed and loved just as God wants them to be welcomed and loved. This is not a preacher job, friends. This is a Christian job. This is a job for each one of us. Let's look for people here who are excluded, and make a point of seeing them included.

Conclusion. On the other hand, if you haven't been living for God, then you do need to change.