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The Theology of Change

"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path."

PSALM 119:105



JOHN WEAVER

WEAVER BIBLE COLLEGE



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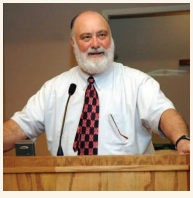
Be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind.

ROMANS 12:2, EXCERPT

Change may reflect faithful growth or a departure from an enduring standard. John Weaver examines how the believer should assess change in the light of Scripture, considering both renewal and responsibility. These messages invite readers to distinguish changing circumstances from the principles by which those circumstances must be judged.

“We should not deny it or run from it, but we must learn to change in a biblical manner.”

JOHN WEAVER



John Weaver

John Weaver's sermons form the teaching collection presented by Weaver Bible College. This volume gathers his teaching from that collection.

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CHAPTER 1

The Theology of Change - 1

The Theology of Change

Introduction: God's Immutability and Human Change

Malachi 3:6 says, “For I am the Lord, I change not. Therefore, you sons of Jacob are not consumed.” This is the first message in a series of five on the theology of change.

Only God is immutable. He does not change, and He does not need to change, since He is perfect. He cannot change for the better because He is already perfect, and He cannot change for the worse because then He would cease to be perfect. Therefore, He is the only one who does not change. We are creatures of change; we change constantly.

Have you ever changed your mind? I am not speaking only to women. Women usually take the brunt of the jokes when it comes to mind-changing episodes, but the truth is, men change their minds just as often as women. Have you ever changed your position on certain subjects? Have you ever changed doctrinally? The truth of the matter is that every one of us, each one of us, changes our minds.

Each one changes his positions. Everyone changes doctrinally. If you have not changed, then you have basically ceased learning; that is what it amounts to.

I have known men who were hardcore dispensational premillennialists become postmillennialists, and men who changed to other eschatological positions as well. Everyone who has embraced the doctrines of grace had to change from Arminianism; there was a change in theology. I have known men who were antinomian—those who were against God's law—become theonomists, those who believe in God's law. We change our doctrinal positions on a number of subjects. I have known men who changed their positions on baptism, on communion, and on a number of issues as well.

The question is: How did you change, and why did you change? What was the motivation, and what was the factoring cause behind it? Did you change for a biblical reason and from a biblical standpoint? In other words, there are reasons to change and certain reasons not to change. Men are fickle creatures. They will change at the drop of a hat, and they will drop the hat themselves. Many times, the reasons men change are not good reasons at all.

The Nature of Preferences

We do not grasp the difference between preferences and convictions. I want to spend a little time showing you the difference between these two things so that we may understand change.

A preference is something that we desire above and over something else. A preference is a choice, an estimation of value, something that we like, and sometimes a passion. I prefer a ribeye steak, but I will eat a sirloin. I prefer cherry ice cream, but I will eat vanilla. That is simply a preference.

Webster's 1828 Dictionary describes preference as "the act of preferring one thing before another, estimating one thing above another, choice of one thing rather than another." Then he says, "The knowledge of things alone gives value to our reasonings and preference of one man's knowledge over another."

Consider this illustration. If I were to look at Megan and say, “Here’s a handful of gold coins, and here’s a glass of clear, cool, crystal water, which would you prefer?” Obviously, right now, she would take the handful of gold coins. But if she were out in the desert, perishing, she would prefer the glass of water. Her estimation of the value of that water would be far greater than that of the gold coins.

Biblical Usage of 'Prefer'

A preference is something that we like. The words prefer, preferring, and preferred do appear in the Bible, and we have to distinguish the way these words are used. In Psalm 137:6, David makes this statement: “If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth. If I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy.” Notice that: “if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy.”

The word prefer here literally means to choose as more excellent, to highly value, and to highly regard. All the psalmist is saying is, if I do not choose Jerusalem, if I do not prefer it, if I do not estimate it far more valuable than my chief joy, then let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth.

In the New Testament, we have three different usages of the word. First, the word prefer refers to the Lord Jesus Christ. John 1:15 says, "John bare witness of Him and cried, saying, This was He of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me, for He was before me." Note what is said concerning Jesus Christ: He was preferred before John the Baptist. Again, in verse 27, John says, "He it is who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoes' latchet I am not worthy to unloose." Then, in verse 30: "This is He of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me," followed by this statement: "for He was before me."

In each of these three passages, the Greek word is ginomai, which is translated as preferred, but it means in the sense that He existed before. The word points to His priority and existence before John. He was first. John was saying that Jesus Christ was first; He existed before him. Therefore, He is preferred before John. The emphasis in these passages is not upon John choosing to place Christ first, but upon the fact that Christ was before him.

Romans 12:10 gives another Greek word translated preferring: "Be kindly affectionate one to another with brotherly love in honor, preferring one another." The word used here is proēgeomai. It literally means to lead the way for others, to show deference, in that we place others before ourselves. Thus, the verse could be expressed this way: "Be kindly affectionate one to another with brotherly love," and, in honor, give deference one to another. In this usage, preferring one another concerns the way believers are to treat one another, giving honor and placing others before themselves.

In other words, I would open the door for Marshall, and Marshall would open the door for me. We are in honor preferring one another. That means to lead the way by showing kindness to each other.

Then, in 1 Timothy chapter 5 and verse 21, Paul writes, “I charge thee before God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels that thou observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality.” Someone may say, “There is a contradiction, because in Romans 12:10 he tells us to prefer one another, and now he tells us, ‘without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality.’” There is no contradiction between Romans 12:10 and 1 Timothy 5:21.

The answer is that these are two totally different Greek words. The word in Romans 12:10 means to show deference, to lead the way, and to be kind toward. In 1 Timothy 5:21, the word is prokrima, which literally means to judge beforehand, to form an opinion before the facts are revealed, or to be prejudiced. Literally, he says, “I charge thee before God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels that thou observe these things without prejudice or without prejudging, or without making a decision before you hear the facts before another, doing nothing by partiality.” Certainly, doing nothing by partiality explains what he means there about prejudging.

When we think of our preferences, we think of our likes and dislikes. There is nothing wrong with a preference as long as it does not violate the Word of God. The problem is that, since we are fallen creatures, most individuals prefer sin and rebellion. We prefer to please and satisfy our flesh and to fulfill the desires of our mind.

Christian liberty does not include liberty to sin. Sinning is not liberty; sinning is licentiousness. The Apostle Paul wrote in Galatians 5:13, “For brethren, you have been called unto liberty, only use not your liberty for an occasion of the flesh, but by love serve one another.” You cannot mask licentiousness, sin, and pleasing your flesh under the cover of Christian liberty. Do not do that. A preference is simply that which you prefer; it is a choice. A conviction differs from a preference.

Defining Convictions

A conviction is a deep-rooted belief or standard that has been impressed upon our minds by our authority. Let me spell it out: the authority for the child of God is the Bible. We have often said it like this: the Bible is our sole rule for faith and practice. It tells us what to believe, and it tells us how we are to act. Anyone who has a conviction, even an unsaved man or someone from a different cult, derives that conviction from his authority, whatever that authority is. It may be an unbiblical authority; it may not even be a real authority, but to him it is an authority. So when we speak of conviction as Christians, we mean a conviction based upon our authority. It is deeply ingrained in us by the Word of God.

In fact, Paul wrote Titus in Titus 1 and verse 9, and he said, "Holding fast the faithful word as he had been taught that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and convince the gainsayers." Now note what he said: "holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught." In other words, that faithful word is his authority. The difference between a preference and a conviction is based upon the reasoning that led to the choice. In the case of a conviction, the choice is tied to what God declares is right and wrong. We have our convictions based upon this: God says this is right; therefore, we are going to do it. God says this is wrong; therefore, we are not going to do it. A preference does not necessarily have to have a biblical influence. It might, but it does not necessarily have to have one. A preference is just something individual, but a conviction always has a biblical influence.

Differences Between Preferences and Convictions

Let me give you another difference between a preference and a conviction. A preference may be a strong belief held with great strength, but it is a belief or position that will change under the right circumstances. A conviction is a position that you hold that will not change unless you see differently from your authority. In other words, if the Bible is my sole authority for faith and practice, and I have a conviction based upon a certain doctrine, the only way I will change my mind is if, through study and the illumination of the Holy Spirit, I see that I have misunderstood or misinterpreted, and/or God gives me further enlightenment and further understanding. That way I can change. Usually, a conviction is based upon the Word of God and will require further instruction and enlightenment in order to change.

In 2 Corinthians chapter 10, Paul makes an astounding statement, and I want to explain it. Beginning with verse 3, he says, "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh." There is a warfare that is after the flesh, but the kind of warfare Paul is about to discuss is not a fleshly warfare. In verse 4 he says, "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal."

The Mental Warfare of Convictions

That is, they are not a .357 Magnum. They are not an AK-47 or an AR-15. He says, "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds."

Now watch verse 5: "Casting down imaginations and every high thing or every high thought that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." The Apostle Paul is saying in this passage that there are carnal weaponry, but carnal weaponry will not work in this warfare that we are fighting, because it is a mental warfare. So suppose Marshall and I disagree on some point of theology. We disagree vehemently. Marshall says, "I will teach him," and comes, sticks a pistol to my temple, and says, "Pastor, you will embrace my position."

The Test of Pleasure

Suppose a man held a pistol to my temple and demanded that I agree with him. I might say, "Well, yes, I think I will." He might say, "Good," and put the pistol away. Did I change? Not necessarily. I could have been saying that merely until I got the pistol away from my temple; then I could deal with him. If I told him I agreed with him, there would be no way in the world that he could prove my mind was really changed. So, when it comes to changing convictions, all kinds of material things are really not going to change us at all. There are, therefore, a number of challenges to our convictions.

The Bible gives us tests that demonstrate whether our faith is a preference or a conviction. I want today to give you two of those tests. Lord willing, next Sunday I will give you another two, and then I will begin to show you how to change your mind theologically and biblically. But first, I am going to show you some things that should not make you change your mind.

We all like to think that we are men and women of conviction, but the truth is that most of us are men and women of preference. It is where the rubber hits the road that we find out whether we have a preference or a conviction. What is the first test? First of all, there is the test of pleasure. So many people have succumbed to the throne of pleasure. It is pleasure that brings us to our knees.

Test 1: The Test of Pleasure

The Apostle Paul had to say of Demas in 2 Timothy 4:10, "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica." Demas deemed pleasure far greater than the Lord Jesus Christ. Man, by his fallen nature, is pleasure-oriented. Man, by his fallen nature, loves pleasure more than righteousness.

Alice and I were on the plane yesterday, and a fellow three or four seats in front of us had to be asked by the steward to calm down. He was bragging about how he was going to drink the biggest beer he could find and head to the closest strip joint he could find. Well, that is fallen man. The Bible says in 2 Timothy 3:4 that man by nature are "traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God."

As Christians, we must confess that as unsaved men and women, we too were ruled by pleasure. Paul wrote in Titus 3:3, "For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice, envying, hateful, and hating one another." But notice that he said, in time past, we lived in divers lusts and pleasures. Before we were converted, we lived for ourselves, for our flesh, for our pleasure, and for what made us happy and feel good.

Without regard to God or His law, we thought nothing of Him; we thought only of ourselves. So here is the question that you have to ask: Is morality a preference for you, or is it a conviction? Is obedience a conviction, or is it a preference? Is righteousness a conviction, or is it a preference? Are you willing to sacrifice your biblical standards for pleasure? It is absolutely astounding and amazing what people will sacrifice, give up, and deny for a few minutes of pleasure. Mighty men have fallen at the throne of pleasure.

Turn in your Bibles to Proverbs, chapter 6. Here is a very interesting passage. I want to point out verse 23 before reading the rest. He says, "For the commandment is a lamp, and the law is a light, and the reproofs of instruction are the way of life." What we have in verse 23 is our authority. This should be a conviction, because the commandment is a lamp, the law is a light, and reproofs of instruction are the way of life.

What will these convictions, based upon the Word of God, keep us from? Verse 24 says, "To keep thee from the evil woman, and from the flattery of the tongue of a strange woman." Then he says, "Lust not after her beauty in thine heart, neither let her take thee with her eyelids. For by means of a whorish woman, a man is brought to a piece of bread, and the adulteress will hunt for the precious life." Now watch these questions: "Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned? Can one go upon hot coals, and his feet not be burned?"

Proverbs gives this warning: “So he that goeth into his neighbor's wife, whosoever toucheth her shall not be innocent.” Then it says: “Men do not despise a thief, if he steal to satisfy his soul when he is hungry. But if he be found, he shall restore sevenfold. He shall give

all the substance of his house. But whoso committeth adultery with a woman lacketh understanding. He that doeth it destroyeth his own soul."

"A wound and dishonor shall he get, and his reproach shall not be wiped away. For jealousy is the rage of a man, therefore he will not spare in the day of vengeance. He will not regard any ransom, neither will he rest content, though thou givest many gifts."

Note how this passage warning against sensual pleasure begins by explaining the commandment as a lamp and the law as a light. In other words, if you believe the Word of God and have a conviction concerning morality, it will keep you from all these problems and troubles. If you have a mere preference, it will not.

Samson lost his power and his life over a woman. David not only lost his honor, but his family over a woman. Mighty men have fallen at the feet of pleasure.

Consider Proverbs 7: "Hearken unto me now, therefore, O you children, and attend to the words of my mouth." In other words, listen to this authority and get a conviction here. "Let not thine heart decline to her ways." That is the adulteress and the whorish woman. "Go not astray in her paths. Why? For she hath cast down many wounded, yea, many strong men have been slain by her. Her house is the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death."

When a man professes to be a Christian, yet is willing to sacrifice his honor and principles for a little pleasure, he does not have a conviction. He has a preference.

Remember what Joseph said when Potiphar's wife tried to seduce him: "There is none greater in this house than I. Neither has he kept back anything from me but thee, because thou art his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" And he ran out.

Convictions will not bow to pleasure. Preferences will.

Temporary vs. Eternal Pleasures

The Scriptures do teach us that there are pleasures in sin. Those pleasures, the Bible also teaches, are temporary. They are fleeting,

destroying, and damning. A man who is willing to trade his honor for a few minutes of pleasure does not have a conviction.

Remember Moses. He was raised by Pharaoh's daughter, which means he would probably have been in line to be the next Pharaoh. Pharaoh certainly could have fulfilled any and all pleasures. But the Bible says in Hebrews 11:25, "Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season." There are pleasures in sin, but only for a season. If a man were able to live for five hundred years and fulfill all the pleasures he wanted, five hundred years would still be only a season compared with eternity.

In Luke 8, when our Lord was speaking about the parable of the sower, some seed fell among thorns. He said, "And they which fell among thorns are they which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with the cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection." There are pleasures in sin, but they are temporary, dooming, and damning.

That is why John wrote in 1 John 2:15–17, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, are not of the Father, but are of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever."

Romans 13:14 says, "But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof." Put on the Lord Jesus Christ: put on the robe of righteousness, the truth of Jesus Christ, the Word of God, and the convictions of truth. Make no provision for the flesh to fulfil its lusts.

We have to realize that real pleasures are eternal. Fleshly pleasures are temporary. Psalm 16, verse 11, says, "Thou wilt show me the path of life, and thy presence is fullness of joy. At thy right hand there are pleasures forevermore." So there are eternal pleasures, and these eternal pleasures stand in stark contrast to temporary pleasures.

The Apostle Paul gives us this distinction in 2 Corinthians chapter 4, verse 17. You remember the Bible says that Moses chose to suffer

affliction with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. Here Paul writes, "For our light affliction which is but for a moment." That is all the trouble, all the persecution that we can handle. "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporal, and the things which are not seen are eternal."

So those pleasures which are not seen, which are at the right hand of God, are eternal. The pleasures that we do see are simply temporal. That is all there is to it. The man of conviction is one who cannot be bought with pleasure. He will not bow the knee to the throne of pleasure. When people sacrifice their principles for pleasure, it demonstrates that they are people of preference and not men and women of conviction.

Test 2: The Test of Profit

There is a second test to determine whether or not we have a preference or a conviction, and that second test is profit. Money is not the root of all evil. It is the love of money that is the root of all evil. When it comes to money in any shape, form, or fashion, men quickly lose all of the convictions that they previously held. We are warned concerning this over and over. Let me show you three passages. Turn to 2 Peter chapter 2.

In Second Peter 2:15, the Bible speaks of wicked men who “have forsaken the right way, that is the biblical way, and are going astray, following the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness.” Note Balaam, and note that he loved the wages of unrighteousness. This passage identifies the right way as the biblical way and describes those who leave it as going astray.

Jude 11 gives another statement: “Woe to them, for they’ve gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Korah.” Here we read of the error of Balaam for reward. Jude, the last book before Revelation, places this error alongside the way of Cain and the gainsaying of Korah.

Revelation 2:14 speaks of Balaam again. Our Lord says to the church, “But I have a few things against thee because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam.” Thus the church is warned concerning those who hold Balaam’s doctrine.

“Who taught Balak to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.” That is a very interesting statement. Balaam was a false prophet. Balak was the king of Moab, and he sent messengers, princes, to Balaam, asking him to come curse Israel. Balaam told the messengers, “I can’t go if God doesn’t allow me to go.” God had told him not to go, so he told the men, “I can’t go.” They returned and told Balak, “He’s not coming.”

Balak then sent far more princes and greater princes, along with more money and more promises. He wanted Balaam to come curse Israel. God told Balaam, “If these men come to get you in the morning, go with them. But if not, you can’t go.” The next morning, Balaam got up, sat on his ass, looked at the men, and said, “Let’s go.” That is when the angel of the Lord stood in the way with his sword drawn, going to kill Balaam.

The ass saw the angel, but Balaam did not. The ass veered into a field. Balaam became angry, kicking and beating the ass, and got her back in the way. Then she went up against the wall and crushed his foot. He was upset and beat his donkey. Finally, the angel stood where the ass could not go left or right. When she saw the angel with the sword drawn, she fell, and Balaam again began beating her.

One of the strangest things in the Bible happened: the ass looked at Balaam and said, “Have I ever done this before?” He said, “Nay.” Thus the ass was speaking and the prophet was naying. He said, “But you’ve shamed me these three times.” Then God opened his eyes, and he saw the angel. The angel said, “If it had not been for this ass, you would have been dead.” Or Balaam said, “If it’s going to displease you, I will get me back.” The angel said, “No, you’re going now.”

But you can only say what I tell you to say, and that's it. Three times Balak took Balaam to curse Israel, and three times he blessed Israel. I want to show you something in the book of Numbers,

chapter 22. We are not going to read all of it, but let me point it out. This is the story that I just told you.

In Numbers 22, verse 1, we read, "And the children of Israel set forward and pitched in the plains of Moab on this side of Jordan by Jericho." Verse 2 says, "And Balak the son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites." This is where he sent for Balaam, and this is the story that I just told you. Three times Balaam was called upon to curse Israel, and three times he blessed them.

In chapter 24, verse 10, we read, "And Balak's anger was kindled against Balaam. And he smote his hands together, and Balak said unto Balaam, I call thee to curse mine enemies, and behold, thou hast altogether blessed them these three times. Therefore now flee thou out of thy place. I thought to promote thee into great honor, but lo, the Lord hath kept thee back from honor. And Balaam said unto Balak, Spake I not also unto thy messengers which thou sentest unto me, saying, If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the commandment of the Lord, to do either good or bad of mine own mind, but what the Lord saith, that will I speak."

Then verse 14 says, "And now, behold, I go unto my people. Come, therefore, and I will advertise thee what this people shall do to thy people in the latter day."

Now look back to Revelation, chapter 2, and verse 14. We have already taken note of the fact that the Bible tells us Balaam loved the wages of unrighteousness and ran greedily after the reward. But notice what he says: "But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast the stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication."

God had made Balaam bless Israel and would not allow him to curse Israel. So that meant he did not get his reward.

Ah, but there is another way. “Balak, I cannot curse Israel, but I will tell you how to get God to curse Israel, and you can still give me my money.” Look in Numbers chapter 25, beginning with verse 1: “And Israel abode in Shittim. And the people began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab. And they called the people unto the sacrifices of their gods. And the people did eat and bowed

down to their gods. And Israel joined himself unto Baal-peor. And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel." Do you know how many people died? Look at verse 9. God was so angry that He sent a plague: "And those that died in the plague were twenty-four thousand." Balaam said, "I cannot curse Israel. But if you will give me my money, I will tell you how to get God to curse Israel." You know something, folks?

Compromise in Ministry for Profit

If you and I were to grasp the multitude of compromises, sellouts, and downright bribery among pastors and churches, we would be absolutely shocked. The 501(c)(3) incorporations are just the tip of the iceberg. Consider the huge church buildings filled with thousands of people each Lord's Day. The pastors cannot preach and teach the whole counsel of God because they know that some people will become upset and leave. Therefore, they will lose donations. They are so concerned about donations because most of these churches are in debt up to their eyeballs. Consequently, they cut and compromise the Word of God and steal the Word of God in order to keep the money coming in.

I have heard preachers say, concerning the doctrines of grace or other major doctrines of the Bible, "I actually believe that, but I cannot preach it because my people would never put up with it." Let me translate that: They would either run me off, or I would run them off. If I run them off, I cannot make my sinking-fund payments; and if they run me off, I lose my income, my job, my position, my retirement—everything. That is exactly what they are saying. When we refuse to preach and teach the whole counsel of God, we are cursing people. Are we any better than Balaam?

In Acts chapter 20, the Apostle Paul called the Ephesian elders to meet him at Miletus and began giving them instruction. Acts 20:17 says, "And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church." He continued: "And when they were come to him, he said unto them, Ye know from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons. Serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears and temptations

which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews, and how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you."

Now, "how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you." You remember what the Bible says in 2 Timothy 3:16? "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable." If he kept back nothing that was profitable, it meant he preached the whole counsel of God. He said, "...and how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have showed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house, testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ."

"And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me. But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God." He added, "And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more."

Paul told the preachers, "I am pure from the blood of all men." How did he do that? Did he witness to everyone he saw? No; that is humanly impossible. He explained, "I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God." He charged them: "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God which he purchased with his own blood."

"For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch and remember, by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears." Paul said he was free from the blood of all men because he had preached the whole counsel of God.

When the Word of God is diluted, watered down, substituted, or not preached, blood is upon our hands. When you read Jeremiah 23,

God condemns taking away from His Word, adding to His Word, and substituting for His Word. The preacher's responsibility is to declare the Word of God, all of it. It is up to God to apply it and to grant understanding of it. I am not responsible for the results of preaching.

I have preached, and people have become glad and rejoiced, saying, "I'm so happy." At other times people have become angry and cursed me. That is not my responsibility. My responsibility is to preach and teach. The truth is the truth whether people like it, receive it, or agree with it. That is beside the point. We have to preach and teach the Word of God.

Application: Doctrine Produces Convictions

One application is this: preferences are not convictions. You will easily, quickly, and readily yield up a preference, but you would be willing to die for a conviction. Since our duty is based upon our doctrine, it is absolutely necessary to understand doctrine, because doctrine gives us our convictions. An individual who does not know Bible doctrine cannot have a conviction, because he does not have his source of authority correct. He must know what God says.

Doctrine is based upon the infallible, inerrant, inspired Word of God. When you grasp the authority of the Word of God and see what God says, you begin to develop convictions, because you know this is the truth of God. God has told you what you believe, how you are to live, and how you are to act. You become a man or woman of conviction, not merely of preference. Our conviction is based upon the Word of God.

We cannot change a conviction for pleasure or profit. There are two other tests which I will share with you next Lord's Day. But understand this: if there is conviction, it will be true till death. It will not yield.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee this day. We thank You for Your Word and Your truth, and ask for grace that we may serve Thee acceptably with reverence and godly fear. And Lord, You would be pleased to make us men of conviction. Help us, we pray, in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

CHAPTER 2

The Theology of Change - 2

Introduction and Review

Malachi 3 and verse 6 begins the second message in the series on the theology of change, or changing your mind doctrinally. The Scripture says, “For I am the Lord, I change not. Therefore, ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.” God only is immutable; He is changeless. We are creatures of change. We are fickle. Many times we will not only change at the drop of a hat; we will drop the hat ourselves just so we can change.

Last week I began dealing with the difference between a preference and a conviction. So many people want to think that they are men and women of conviction, when in reality we are men and women of preference.

A preference is something that we desire above anything else. It is a choice, an estimation of value, and a like. I prefer a ribeye steak, but I will eat a sirloin. I prefer cherry ice cream, but I will eat vanilla. A preference is something that we like more than anything else, or simply prefer more than anything else.

The words “prefer,” “preferred,” and “preferring” are used in the New Testament. According to Webster’s 1828 Dictionary, preference is the act of preferring one thing above another; estimation of one thing above another; choice of one thing rather than another. It is our reasoning that gives value to our choices. If you have not heard the first message, I would encourage you to do so.

A conviction differs from a preference. A conviction is a deep-rooted belief or standard imposed upon us by our authority. For the Christian, for the child of God, our authority is the Word of God. The Scripture is our sole rule for faith and practice. Everything that we believe and everything that we do should be rooted and grounded in Scripture. Paul wrote Titus, in Titus 1 and verse 9, “Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and convince the gainsayers.” Notice that he said, “holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught.”

I was asked a question last week after the morning service: “What about those who are not Christians? What about the cults or the other false religions?” The question dealt with their convictions. Their convictions are likewise based upon their authority, whatever that authority is. It may be a wrong authority, and their convictions may be wrong, but they are still based upon their authority.

Every conviction is based upon an authority. A preference is not. A preference may have a biblical influence, but it does not have to have one. A conviction always has a biblical influence, or at least an influence from some authority. There is also a difference between a conviction and a preference in that a preference may be held with great strength, but it will change under the right circumstances.

For example, I have gone into restaurants and ordered something, only to be told, “We’re out of that.” That is what I really want, but if they are out of it, I will take something else rather than get up and go somewhere else. A preference will be easily changed under the right circumstances, but a conviction will not be changed.

Last week, in the first message, I began pointing out the tests given to us in Scripture that pinpoint whether we have a preference or a conviction. The very first test, or evidence, is pleasure. The truth

is that most people are desire-oriented and pleasure-oriented. Every unsaved person prefers his pleasure. In fact, the Bible tells us that men by nature are lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God. If you are going to sacrifice your honor, character, or position for pleasure, then you do not have a conviction.

The Test of Pleasure

As the Apostle Paul said of Demas, "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world." He preferred pleasure rather than the truth of God. The Bible says that Moses chose "to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season." Pleasure is one of the greatest tests. Many individuals have been slain at the altar of pleasure because they sacrifice everything for it.

The second test is profit. If you are willing to allow your positions to be compromised for money or profit, then you do not really have convictions; you have a preference. Scripture shows how God condemned Balaam, who "ran greedily after the reward," and was wrong in so many areas and respects. When you stop and think about money or riches, most everybody is willing to sacrifice his own soul for money.

The Test of Profit

Our Lord said, "What will a man exchange for his own soul? If he gained the whole world and loses his own soul, well, he's still the loser." Proverbs 11:4 says, "Riches profit not in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivereth from death." You can be the richest man in the world, and you are still going to die; riches will not profit you one thing. They will simply be left. Proverbs 11:28 says, "He that trusteth in his riches shall fall, but the righteous shall flourish as a branch." When God speaks of Babylon's fall, Revelation 18:7 says, "For in one hour so great riches have come to nothing."

One of my favorite stories is about a wealthy man who died. As they carried the casket to the grave, one pallbearer looked at another and asked, "How much did he leave?" The other answered, "He left it all." That is a fact: he left it all.

Since profit is a real test, let me point out the opposite: poverty is also a test. It has been said that when a Christian gets rich, God either gains a fortune or loses a man. The same may be said of poverty. When a Christian is reduced to poverty, he will either become more submissive, obedient, faithful, and dependent upon God, or he will become God's enemy while seeking to extricate himself from his poverty. Let me show you.

Hold Malachi, but turn in your Bibles to Proverbs chapter 30, verses 8 and 9. Notice what the wise man says: “Remove far from me vanity and lies. Give me neither poverty nor riches. Feed me with food convenient for me.” He continues, “Lest I be full and deny thee and say, ‘Who is the Lord?’ Or lest I be poor and steal, and take the name of my God in vain.”

Notice verse 9: “Lest I be full and deny thee.” Our Lord taught us to pray, “Give us this day our daily bread.” Most of us do not pray that because our freezers and pantries are full. One problem with riches, or plenty, is that we ignore God, overlook Him, and think we do not need Him.

But the wise man also speaks of poverty: “Lest I be poor and steal, and take the name of my God in vain.” When preachers speak about taking God’s name in vain, they usually mean cursing or profanity. Yet here a person can take God’s name in vain without cursing or using a slang word, because theft is considered taking God’s name in vain. It is not merely sticking a gun to Gary’s head and saying, “Gary, give me all your money.” If I defraud him, deceive him, or do anything underhanded, it is still a form of theft, and it is called taking the name of God in vain.

How one acts when distressed, despondent, and desperate reveals whether he has a conviction or a preference. It is not only profit and pleasure that test us. I will give you two more today because, next Sunday, Lord willing, I am going to show you why change is absolutely necessary, and the next two messages will deal with how we are to change biblically.

The Test of Pressure

The third test today is pressure. Pressure may take many forms: coercion; peer approval or disapproval; loss of opportunities, jobs, or positions; personal attacks; ridicule; mockery; accusatory denunciation; and slander. Everybody wants to be liked, loved, and respected. We wish to avoid confrontations. No one wants embarrassing displays of animosity, to be cussed out in front of everybody else, or to endure such treatment at all. If we could get by without anything like that happening to us, we would be happy.

But unhappily, that is not the case. Once pressure is put upon us, we are either going to give in to the thoughts, desires, and plans of others, or we are going to hold fast. Circumstances never make or break a man; they just reveal him.

Here is a man in war. The enemy comes rushing in, and he throws down his weapon and turns and runs. Someone says, "That battle made him a coward." No, he was already a coward in his heart. The battle just revealed him. Or he picks up his weapon, runs straight into the enemy, and saves the day and his own company. Someone says, "That battle made him a hero." No, he was already a hero. He was already brave in his heart. The battle just revealed him.

Pressure is going to reveal whether or not we have real convictions or preferences. Every one of us as Christians is going to be maligned and spoken of concerning evil. Pressure will be put upon us to compromise and throw away our standards. Sometimes this pressure will come through organizations. For instance, the Southern Poverty Law Center is not southern, although it is located in Montgomery, Alabama. It is certainly not in poverty, since it controls half a billion dollars, and it is not a law center based upon God's law or constitutional law. It may be a legal center. About the only thing accurate in that name is the word "center," and it might be more accurately spelled S-I-N-N-E-R.

Anyone who disagrees with them is labeled a racist, a bigot, a homophobe, or whatever. Even Ron Paul has been called by them a white supremacist. One black professor who was a real conservative had been labeled racist by the Southern Poverty Law Center.

It is insane, but it seems that on every hand organizations and governmental entities are putting pressure on us to be politically correct. Unhappily, it is not just organizations; sometimes it is individuals as well. Everybody has heard the old adage, "There's strength in diversity." The interesting thing is that when you hear that and begin to disagree with some people, the next thing you know, there's no strength in adversity.

The only strength there is comes when you kowtow to them, bow down to them, and accept their terms, positions, theology, and understanding. They will not allow you to live by the enlightenment, illumination, and understanding that God has given you. They demand that you bow to what they think and believe. Thus they seek to dominate, dictate, and control, applying all the pressure necessary to make sure that you bow to their understanding.

Now, let me give you some Scriptures, and I want you to think with me. David said in Psalm 41:5, "My enemies speak evil of me. When shall he die? And his name perish." They were not only cursing David and spreading lies and slander; they wanted him dead and out of the way.

Sometimes you find that people are saying things about you that are not even true. Why would they say such things to begin with? I never will forget, years ago, when Randy Weaver's wife and son were killed. There was a pastor in Colorado at that time named Pete Peters. Afterward, he invited many preachers to come to his place and try to determine what we would do next time if this happened. Pete Peters was a controversial individual, theologically and politically. I was invited to go with many other preachers, but I could not go because I did not have an opening.

I was supposed to be preaching somewhere else, so I did not go. But, lo and behold, the Southern Poverty Law Center said that John Weaver was there, that I was a leader in that movement, and that I preached there as well. How in the world they got that information, I do not know, because I was not there, I did not preach, and I was not a leader in that movement. Another pastor friend of mine went and did preach, but they never even mentioned him.

This is what David is talking about: “My enemies speak evil of me. When shall he die?” You remember what our Lord said in Matthew 5 and verse 11? “Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake.” Men are going to revile you, persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you for His sake.

James 4 and verse 11 says, “Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law. But if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge.” God is actually forbidding us to speak evil one of another. In 1 Peter 3 and verse 10, we read, “For he that will love life, and have good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile.”

And in 1 Peter 3, verse 16: “And having a good conscience, that whereas they speak evil of you as evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ.” Each of these passages demonstrates that all kinds of pressure will be placed upon believers. We will be reviled, mocked, ridiculed, and hated. We need to make sure that the derogatory remarks spoken against us are spoken falsely, or at least that, if they are spoken against us, they are spoken against us for the truth’s sake.

Years ago, I was preaching in North Carolina. I was with the pastor, and we were out somewhere when he ran into a man he knew. He said, “I’d like to invite you to come to our church for the meeting we’re holding.” The man asked, “Who’s preaching?” The pastor looked at me and said, “John Weaver, right here.” The man replied, “I would never go hear John Weaver.” I asked, “Why?” He said, “Because you ran off from your wife and married another woman.” It turned out there was a Johnny Weaver, a wrestler, who had done that and then supposedly got converted. I said, “Sir, you’ve got the wrong John Weaver, I can assure you, because I’ve got the same one that I started out with.”

He said, “Oh, okay, I’m sorry.” There was somebody else with another name. But our Lord said to make sure that it is done falsely. In Luke 21:17, He said, “Ye shall be hated of all men for my name’s

sake." In John 15:18, He said, "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you."

I am telling you this to point out the truth: We cannot capitulate. We cannot throw away our convictions because of pressure. We cannot give up the truth we understand to be true simply because we desire someone else's approval or peace, or the absence of confrontation. I am sure every one of us has had pressure placed upon us in one way or another. But none of us, I suppose, has ever faced the pressure Martin Luther faced when he stood before the Diet of Worms. What a horrible diet! Actually, it was the Diet of Worms—the Parliament of Worms, Germany. He stood before Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor, the Pope, the cardinals, and all the high church officials. They demanded that he recant, take back everything he had written concerning the Pope and the church, and take back everything he had said truthfully about Christ and the gospel.

Martin Luther looked at Charles V and the Pope. You must remember that they had the power to execute Martin Luther. He said, "Unless I am convinced by scriptures and plain reason, I do not accept the authority of popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other. My conscience is captive to the word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise. God help me. Amen."

That is a conviction. A conviction is not going to change due to pressure. The pressure was placed upon Martin Luther, but he stood because he had a conviction and not a preference. Therefore, we cannot change our theology, our minds, or our positions based upon pleasure, profit, or pressure.

The Test of Persecution

There is a fourth reason that we cannot change, and I suppose it is the greatest test of all: the test of persecution. This may be the most severe test of one's faith and one's convictions. But persecution does not necessarily have to be severe in order to be persecution. You can have a mild persecution. In Matthew 5, verse 11, our Lord said, "Blessed are you when men shall revile you and persecute you and

say all manner of evil against you falsely for my name's sake." Reviling is a mild form of persecution. Slander is a mild form of persecution. Saying things that should not be said and gossiping about someone are mild forms of persecution.

Our Lord told His disciples of a severer form of persecution. In Matthew 10:23, He said, "But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another. For verily I say unto you, ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel till the Son of Man be come." Now it is not just reviling or mockery. They are out to get you. They may be confiscating your property, but at least you still have some leeway; you have the opportunity to remove yourself.

Truthfully, as Christians, we should expect persecution. I am afraid we have not seen anything the way we are going to see it. Our Lord said in John 15:20, "Remember the word that I have spoken unto you. The servant is not greater than his Lord. If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they have kept My saying, they will keep your saying also."

Our persecution is the result of the world's hatred of Jesus Christ. If they persecuted Him, they are going to persecute us. Anytime the church of Jesus Christ or Christians are attacked and persecuted, it is because they hate the Lord Jesus Christ.

Our persecution may range from mild to severe to extreme. It could be as mild as ostracization: "I don't like Steve, so I am going to ostracize him from this group. We will ignore him and have our own group." Another form is shunning. A person may come, but we will not speak to him or have anything to do with him. Confiscation of property, excommunication, and prison are further forms of persecution.

In Luke 21:12, our Lord showed how persecution can be ratcheted up by the powers that be: "But before all these, they shall lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and into prisons, being brought before kings and rulers for my name's sake." Some will be thrown in prison just for the faith of Jesus Christ.

How about Pastor Andrew Brunson? He was arrested in Turkey by the president, Erdogan. He had already been in Turkey for years

preaching. What has happened is that he is now a pawn in a game, because Erdogan wants a Muslim cleric in this country whom he views as an enemy and is trying to swap. Brunson has been in prison for about two years while Erdogan tries to get our government to make the exchange so he can kill a man. Brunson had not done a thing.

Charging him with all kinds of spying and treason is absolutely insane. But here is what some of them do, and that is what our Lord warned about.

Hebrews 11 gives us the classic passage on persecution: "And what shall I more say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthah, of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets, who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of the lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens."

These were some of the things done through faith, but now watch: "Women received their dead raised to life again, and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment. They were stoned. They were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with a sword."

"They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented, of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and in mountains and in dens and caves of the earth. And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise, God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect."

Go back to the statement that women received their dead raised to life again, while others were tortured, not accepting deliverance. Others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, bonds and imprisonment. Note that they were stoned and sawn asunder.

This probably refers to Isaiah. Tradition says that the king was after him, and he hid himself in a hollow tree. They cut the tree down with him in it and sawed the tree in two with him inside. At least, it

happened to some, whether it was Isaiah or not. They were stoned, sawn asunder, tempted, and slain with a sword. They wandered in sheepskins and goatskins, without proper clothing—destitute, afflicted, tormented—in deserts, mountains, dens, and caves of the earth. This is persecution.

When you think about dying for your conviction and the most extreme form of persecution, I hope, if you have never read it, that you will take the time to read Fox's Book of Martyrs. Naturally, John Fox cannot list all the martyrs who have ever lived or been put to death. He is human and could not possibly know them all. Of course, the book mainly deals with England and Europe.

Historical Examples of Martyrdom

Multitudes have died for their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. At least Fox gives us a large number of individuals who died in Scotland, England, Ireland, and other parts of Europe. Young Patrick Hamilton was Scotland's first martyr. He was only twenty-four years of age. In July 1525, Parliament banned the importation of Luther's works into Scotland. In 1528, the Archbishop of St. Andrews summoned Hamilton for a debate concerning the Roman Catholic Church and Reformation doctrine. It was a trap. When Hamilton appeared, he was accused of heresy, and a hasty trial took place. Trials in those days normally lasted several weeks; his lasted twelve hours.

He was sentenced to be burned at the stake, and he was. It took six long, excruciating hours for young Hamilton to die. His death intensified opposition to Roman Catholicism and increased interest in the Reformation. His last words were these: "How long, O Lord, shall darkness cover this realm? How long will you suffer the tyranny of men? Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

Twenty-four years of age, George Wishart was another preacher in Scotland. Wishart traveled throughout the country proclaiming Reformation doctrines with skill and conviction. Cardinal David Baton, Archbishop of St. Andrews, had five Protestants executed in 1544 and twice tried to have George Wishart murdered. In order to preserve Wishart’s life, the men in Scotland who believed the truth had him move each day to a different location. Because of the many

threats upon his life, a bodyguard was assigned to him. One of the men who helped guard George Wishart was John Knox, the trumpeter of Scotland. He carried a large, double-headed broad sword and went everywhere Wishart went to protect him.

When you came to one of Wishart's sermons, you did not get a mass in Latin. What you had was congregational singing and at least an hour-long preaching in the English language. He simply preached the Word of God. But in 1536, he believed that his death was imminent and his arrest unavoidable. Wishart dismissed his bodyguard and said, "One is sufficient for a sacrifice." He was willing to die. Wishart was arrested and condemned as a heretic.

He was strangled and burned at the stake by order of Cardinal Baton. As the fire was lit, Wishart said, "This flame has scorched my body, yet it hath not daunted my spirit." Then, speaking of Cardinal Baton, he said, "But he who from yonder high place beholdeth us with such pride shall within a few days lie the same as ignominiously as now he is seen proudly to rest himself."

Let me translate that: Cardinal Baton, you are fixing to die yourself, and it is not going to be for your honor. You are going to die. Obviously, persecutions were occurring in Scotland, England, France—everywhere. In England, Mary, pretty well known as Bloody Mary, persecuted anyone who did not adhere to Roman Catholicism. Mary I, Queen of England and Ireland from 1553 to 1558, restored Roman Catholicism to England and the authority of the Pope. She was known as Bloody Mary because she had, at a minimum, 300 Protestants burned at the stake for heresy against the Roman Catholic faith.

One of her martyrs was Thomas Cranmer, an older man of peace, a gentle soul, and a warm individual who shunned controversy. He had known days of glory, power, and prominence. Cranmer was the primate of all England—the Archbishop of Canterbury—the protector of kings, the trusted friend of queens, a loving husband and father, a trusted churchman, and the author of the Book of Common Prayer. In 1556, Cranmer was arrested and thrown into a damp, dark prison.

He was cut off from his friends and family, wracked by grief, and bombarded daily by the Roman Catholic bishops and their rhetoric. He was growing weary and tired. Only two options were available to him. First, he could assert the truth he had long preached: that Jesus Christ alone was the head of the church, that the Mass was a Roman Catholic innovation, that purgatory was not found in the Word of God, and that man must be born again. Or, second, he could give in to the pressure and retain his position as Archbishop of Canterbury by signing a piece of paper.

Just a few weeks earlier, two of his friends, Hugh Latimer and Nicholas Ridley, had been burned at the stake. I had been there and stood on the very spot where they were burned. It is now at the edge of a street, if they have moved the street. Cranmer could look out his prison window and see where Latimer and Ridley had been burned. His mind began to play tricks with him. What good did it do for those men to be burned? Their voices were silent; they could no longer serve the Lord Jesus. They had no ministry or influence. They were gone.

Cranmer understood that if he persisted in his belief, that would be his lot as well. To avoid being burned and retain his position, all he had to do was sign the paper and publicly recant. Cranmer signed the recantation. He sincerely believed in Jesus Christ, the Word of God, and everything he had preached. After signing the paper, there was relief, but only for a little while.

Then Matthew 10:33 came roaring into Cranmer's mind, where our Lord said, "But whosoever shall deny me before man, him also will I deny before my Father who is in heaven." Cranmer had been a peacemaker, a gentleman, and kind-hearted. He did not think that he could take a burning at the stake. He would much rather have died in his own bed in a respectable state. Once he signed that, and Matthew 10:33 began to haunt his mind, he knew he had betrayed the Lord Jesus Christ.

He spent hours alone, weeping, crying, and begging for forgiveness. He knew that Peter had denied his Lord three times, and yet the Lord had forgiven and restored him. His mind was that, if he could just take that quill pen and make it suck up the ink, or make those words melt, they would disappear. But they would not

and could not. He had signed. Now the bishops had allotted him a day at the great cathedral, where he was to publicly recant and deny everything that he had preached. When he got to the cathedral, it was packed.

Many of his followers were there, waiting to see if their teacher really denied the Lord Jesus Christ. The bishops were there to gloat over the fact that they had pressured and persecuted him to the extent that he was going to publicly deny the truth. When it came time for Cranmer to speak, listen to what he said.

Cranmer said, "I come to the great thing that troubles my conscience more than any other thing that I've ever said or did in my life. And that is the setting abroad of writings contrary to the truth, which here now I renounce and refuse." The bishops thought, "We've got him." The people thought, "Oh my, he's going to deny the Lord Jesus Christ." There was a tense silence on the part of the bishops and the people.

Every eye was fixed upon him. Cranmer continued: "I've written many things untrue. And forasmuch as my hand offended in writing contrary to my heart, therefore my hand shall be first punished. For if I come to the fire, it shall be first burned." He then spread his shoulders and continued, "I refuse him as Christ's enemy and an Antichrist in all his false doctrine, and as for the sacrament..."

By this time, the bishops began screaming and railing upon him. Like Stephen in Acts 6, they gnashed upon him with their teeth. They took the old man, tied him to a stake, and set him on fire. Here was the Archbishop of Canterbury. His wife and children were safely in Germany, and they did not even find out until weeks later that he was dead.

When Cranmer was tied to the stake and the fire was lit, his followers were there. True to his word, as the fire was kindled and began to leap around him, he purposely took his right hand and held it in the flames. He watched the flames dissolve the flesh and bone until there was nothing left but a stub. Then the old man died saying, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” That is a conviction.

You may waver because you are human or because you are weak. But if it is a real conviction, you will die for it. Little Thomas Bilney,

another martyr, was visited by his friends in his cell before he was to be burned at the stake the next day. They found him in a happy mood; he had just eaten a big supper. They asked him, “How can you be so happy, knowing that you are going to be burned to death tomorrow?”

Young Thomas Bilney said, “I no more fear the flame than I fear anything.” He held his finger over the candle flame until the flesh burned away and nothing but the bone was exposed. He said, “As my Lord has protected my finger from pain tonight, He’ll protect my body from pain tomorrow.” And He did so.

Conclusion and Call to Stand Firm

There is a theology of change which I am going to show you, and there is a way to change. But we cannot change because of pleasure or profit, including poverty, nor because of pressure and persecution. We must prepare our heads and our hearts. As the Apostle Paul said, we must stand, and having done all, to stand. We must remember Matthew 10:33: “But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.” We cannot, under any circumstance, deny the Lord Jesus Christ.

Father, in Thy name we bow to Thee this day. We thank You for Your Word, Your truth, and the testimony of these men, demonstrating what real, genuine conviction is. Help us to be men and women of conviction, to see the authority of Your Word, and to stand on Your truth and for Your truth. Give us grace that we may serve Thee acceptably with reverence and godly fear. In Thy name we pray, Amen.

CHAPTER 3

The Theology of Change - 3

Introduction: The Necessity of Change

Malachi 3:6 says, “For I am the Lord, I change not. Therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.” Second Corinthians 3:18 says, “But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass, the glory of the Lord are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.”

In the last two messages, I have dealt with the distinction between a preference and a conviction, as well as things that should not change us, especially things that should not change our theology: profit, pleasure, pressure, and persecution. But the truth of the matter is that we do change, and change is absolutely necessary.

When you think of the word change, all you can say is, What a word. It depends upon one's frame of reference and circumstances whether change is refreshing or dismal. We all change. Change may be for the better or for the worse, yet we all change. Most people do not like change, and I will explain why a little later. In fact, the older you get, the more you dislike change, I can assure you. The more technology advances, the more you hate to see it advance.

We had not had a television in years, but when we had a VCR, I suppose for thirty years it still blinked because I never knew how to change the thing. It blinked until finally we got rid of it. These phones today are much the same. If something has to be done to my phone, I just hand it to my grandson. I fix it, you know; I do not know anything about it. Change can be very difficult for us, that is for sure.

The word change refers to that which is altered, replaced, substituted, transformed, or converted. We may not necessarily like change.

God's Immutability and Man's Mutability

Changelessness belongs to God alone. This is absolutely necessary, especially from a biblical perspective. He alone is immutable; He is unchangeable. Immutability belongs to the Creator, while mutability belongs to the creature. That is, we are changing individuals. God is the most perfect being; therefore, He cannot change for the better because He is already perfect, and He cannot change for the worse because then He would be less than perfect. That is why Malachi 3:6 says, “For I am the Lord, I change not.” You must remember that the same is said concerning Jesus Christ in Hebrews 13:8: “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, today, and forever.”

When God created Adam, which we will talk about a little bit more next week, He gave him original righteousness, holiness, and knowledge, but He created him mutable, that is, changeable. Adam was also given dominion. When you stop and think that Adam was created with original righteousness, holiness, and knowledge, given dominion, and living in an absolutely perfect environment, yet he sinned, how could he possibly have sinned in a perfect environment? The answer is that he was made mutable; he could change. Adam did change. Adam was not God. He literally changed God for Satan, truth for a lie, holiness for rebellion, peace for trouble, comfort for misery, and righteousness for sin. So he changed, and obviously, because of that, he now cannot change back. It is one thing to change from good to bad, but now he had a depraved and fallen nature, and it was impossible for Adam’s posterity to change back in and of itself.

That is why, in Jeremiah 13:23, God asked this question: “Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Then may you do good who are accustomed to doing evil.” We not only have a fallen nature; we have also acquired a habitual stance in sinning and rebelling against God. We have become accustomed to it, comfortable in it, and do not necessarily want to change in and of ourselves. That is why 2 Timothy 3:13 says that “evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse.”

The Inability of Fallen Man to Change Spiritually

Romans 8, verses 6 through 8, shows how far Adam fell. Adam became what we would call totally depraved. Consequently, all of Adam's posterity are totally depraved as well. To show the extent of that depravity and inability, the Bible says, "For to be carnally minded, that is fleshly minded, for to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace." He explains why the carnal mind is death: "Because the carnal mind, that is the fleshly mind, the mind by nature, the carnal mind is enmity against God." The word "enmity" is a very strong word for hatred. It is literally like this: because the carnal mind is strong hatred against God, "for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." Because of this truth, verse 8 says, "So then, they that are in the flesh cannot please God."

Anyone who is in the flesh does not have the ability to please God in himself. No one has the power to please God in himself. The reason is that the carnal mind is enmity against God. It is not subject to the law of God; neither, indeed, can it be.

First Corinthians 2:14 tells us that fallen man does not have the faculties to discern the truth of God and spiritual things: "But the natural man, that is the unsaved man, fallen man, but the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God. For they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them."

"Can" is a term of ability; "may" is a term of permission. "Neither can he know them." Why? Because they are spiritually discerned. Fallen man does not have the faculties to spiritually discern the truth of God, and that truth is absolute foolishness unto him. Unless a man is changed by the grace of God, he will not change so that he can

please and honor God, because he does not have the ability to change in himself. You may say, "But I know men that have changed." Yes, you know men that have changed.

However, those changes are not necessarily biblical changes, nor are they spiritual changes. It is true that man may change and become more moral. He may change and become more self-controlled or more mannerly. But that does not mean that those are biblical changes and spiritual changes. I've known men that quit smoking. I've known men that quit drinking. I've known men that quit running around. I've known men that quit a lot of things. But that does not necessarily mean that they were Christians, nor does it mean that they pleased God in those changes.

There are spiritual changes that God demands, and unless these changes are given, there are not going to be anything that will please God. Psalm 55:19 says, "God shall hear and afflict them, even he that abided of old, Selah." The word "Selah" means pause, stop, think about it. Then he says, "Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God." So a man's not going to fear God unless he has been changed. God does demand change, but He is also the One who enables man to change and become pleasing unto Himself. I suppose probably one of the most well-known expressions to designate a Christian is that he is a changed man. And that's true.

I remember preaching in Thomasville, Georgia, years ago, and the pastor's brother was converted. God saved him that night. Afterwards, we went out to a restaurant for something to drink. We were all sitting around, and I never will forget, this man started laughing. His name was Vance. I looked up and said, "Why are you laughing?" He said, "I'm just sitting here thinking. My bird dogs won't understand a word I say to them now. I'm going to have to retrain every one of them." Well, that's true. Once God saves you, you are indeed a changed man. That is for sure. But when we're changed, we're changed by the grace of God.

That's why Psalm 110:3 says, "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power." It is God's power that makes us willing. In the book of Philippians, chapter 2, verses 12 and 13, the Bible likewise shows how God works in His people.

The Apostle Paul writes this: "Wherefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." He did not say, work for your salvation. He said, "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." But he goes further: "For it is God who worketh in you both the will to do his good pleasure." Man cannot work it out unless God works it in. God's grace, mercy, and power work it in us, and we are responsible to work it out. Unless God works in us, there is absolutely nothing to work out.

That's why, in Philippians 1 and verse 6, the Apostle Paul wrote, "Being confident in this very thing, that he who has begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." Once God begins something, He finishes it. That's why Hebrews chapter 12 and verse 2 says, "Looking unto Jesus, the author and the finisher of our faith." If He's the author of it, He's also the finisher of it. Whatever God starts, God also finishes.

We are talking about change. There are some absolute, basic, and necessary changes, and as Christians, we not only have changed, but we are still to be changing. First of all, repentance is a change. If you have not repented, you're not saved. If you have not repented, you're not a Christian.

Repentance as a Change

Our Lord began His ministry in Mark 1 and verse 15, saying, "The time is fulfilled, the kingdom is at hand. Repent ye and believe the gospel." You cannot believe the gospel without repentance. Repentance is absolutely necessary. Yet when you stop and think of what is passed off today as preaching and as the gospel, repentance is not mentioned. Repentance is absolutely demanded by God.

Paul, preaching on Mars Hill, said in Acts chapter 17, verse 30, "In the times of this ignorance, God winked at, but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent." God commands men to repent.

You are going to have to ask yourself why. Here is why: “Because he hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained, whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, and that he raised him from the dead.”

Now let us take this verse apart. God says He commands us to repent. Why? Because He hath appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness. God has appointed a judgment day. Then He says, "by that man whom he hath ordained," who is none other than Jesus Christ, which I shall show you. And then He says, "whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, and that he had raised him from the dead."

Let me spell it out: just as surely as God raised Jesus Christ from the dead, just as surely there is going to be a judgment day, and Jesus Christ is going to be the Judge. God commands us to repent because He has appointed a day in which He is going to judge the world in righteousness by Jesus Christ. He gave us certification and assurance of that fact, and then He raised Jesus Christ from the dead.

John 5, verse 22, says, "For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son." Why has God the Father committed all judgment to the Son? Verse 23 answers: "That all men should honor the Son even as they honor the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him." Jesus Christ is God. Jesus Christ is Judge. God the Father is going to make sure that everyone honours His Son, bows the knee, and confesses and acknowledges that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Repentance is absolutely necessary because it is a change of mind that results in a change of direction. The verb for repentance is metanoeo, and it literally means to change one's mind, to change one's direction, to change one's mind for the better, and to change one's mind in such a way as to amend his doings. When you think of repentance, you have to think absolutely about a change. If I am walking straight toward Steve and I repent, I turn 180 degrees and go the opposite way. When I changed my mind about walking toward him, I began walking away from him. That change of mind resulted in a change of direction.

When we repent, we change our minds about God, the Bible, sin, salvation, and Jesus Christ. In fact, we change our minds about a multitude of things. Before God saved you, you hardly ever gave God a thought. That is one of the charges God lays against the wicked in Psalm 10: "God is not in all their thoughts." I never thought about

Jesus Christ. I was raised in church, and so was Alice. We were in church Sunday morning, Sunday night, Wednesday night, and any night there was a special meeting. Yet I distinctly remember, as a young man, that God was not in all my thoughts.

I never thought much about the Bible, although I was supposed to be hearing it all the time, which I was not. I remember times in my life when an occasional thought would come to me about God, dying, or something else, and I would simply pass it off. But you cannot come to Jesus Christ without repentance. You have to turn from everything contrary to Him and embrace Him in faith. When we repent, we change our minds about all these things, including sin. For all a man thinks sin is pleasurable and profitable, God says it is wicked and rebellious and deserves a death penalty. We do not think about that until God actually gives us repentance.

Now let me tie these two things together. Not only is repentance a change; secondly, conversion is a change. Look in your Bibles to Acts chapter 3, verse 19. Repentance and conversion go together. Actually, they are two sides of one coin.

Conversion as a Change

You cannot really repent unless you are converted, and you cannot really be converted unless you repent. We turn from sin to salvation, from disobedience to obedience, from running away from God to running to God. In Acts chapter 3 and verse 19, Peter says, “Repent ye therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.” Notice what he said: “Repent ye and be converted.” These two things go together.

Peter had healed a man at the beautiful gate and raised him up. When the people gathered, he answered them: “Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we have made this man to walk? The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus, whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go. But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; and killed the Prince of life, whom God hath

raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses. And his name through faith in his name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know: yea, the faith which is by him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all. And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers. But those things, which God before had shewed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled."

"Repent ye therefore, and be converted." What had they done to Jesus Christ? They mocked Him, scourged Him, denied Him, and crucified Him. Now he says, you better repent. You better change your mind about Jesus Christ and about what the Scripture says concerning Him. You need to be converted; you need to turn your life around and do that which God has commanded.

Repentance and conversion go together. If a person really, genuinely, savingly repents—if he really, savingly changes his mind—it results in a change of course and conduct.

The word "converted" here is epistrepho, which literally means to turn: to be converted, to turn about, to turn to the worship of God, to turn to love and obedience, and to turn to wisdom and righteousness.

Stop and think about this. You repent; you change your minds about sin. You now view sin the way God views sin, and therefore you turn to God. Repent concerning your views of Jesus Christ. Before, you never really thought of Him. You never thought of Him as being the Son of God, the Savior, or Lord. But now you repent, and now you turn to Him in faith.

In other words, repentance is something that God gives us initially at salvation, but it continues through all of our life. Conversion is what happens initially when we turn to Jesus Christ, and yet it is possible to be continually converted.

First Thessalonians 1 gives us a wonderful illustration of repentance and conversion and how these two things go together. The Apostle Paul writes to the Thessalonians: "For they themselves show of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God, and to

wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come."

Here repentance and conversion are tied together. You turned from idols—that is, you repented—and then you turned to God to serve the living and true God and to wait for His Son from heaven. God gives us repentance initially. God converts us initially. But repentance and conversion continue throughout all our lives.

I repented when God saved me, but I have done far more repenting since I have been saved than when I got saved. When God saved me, there were a few things over which I was convicted, things I knew were sin. But since that time, as I studied the Scripture, I found out there is a whole lot of other things wrong with me. You have to repent every time God shows you there is something wrong in your life.

You have to be converted. The word "converted" does not necessarily always imply that a person is lost. For instance, in Luke 22:32, Jesus Christ looked at Peter and said, "Peter, Satan has desired to have thee, that he may sift thee as wheat." But He went on to say, "But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not. And when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." Peter was already a saved man.

Our Lord acknowledged that. He said, "I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not." Peter was already a believer. "But when thou art converted"—that is, when you are turned back—you strengthen your brethren. Peter denied our Lord three times. Our Lord said that when Peter turned back, when he was changed, changed his course of conduct and action, and obeyed, he would strengthen his brethren.

The word "conversion" does not necessarily imply an initial conversion; it can be something that goes on in our lives on a constant and continual basis. We may be converted theologically from one position to another. We may be converted intellectually, emotionally, and in a number of ways.

James 5:19 says, "Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and

shall hide a multitude of sins." James is writing to brethren—to Christians. Notice that he says, "Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth." Therefore, it is possible for a Christian to be converted, because it is possible for Christians to sin. James is speaking about Christians being converted. Repentance and conversion go together.

Change by the Grace and Power of God

Biblical change is always by the grace and power of God. In the introduction, I showed you that it is impossible for man to change in and of himself. Therefore, change is always based upon the grace and power of God. You remember what our Lord said in John 15:5? "Without me, you can do what? Nothing." If we can do nothing without Him, obviously our change has to be based upon His grace.

In 2 Corinthians 3:18, Paul says, "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass or in a mirror the glory of the Lord are changed into the same image from glory to glory even as by the Spirit of the Lord." We are talking about Christians. It is as we behold our Lord that we are changed by the Spirit of the Lord.

He must work in us. There is no change apart from beholding Christ, and there is no change apart from the Spirit of the Lord. Men may demand change, expect change, or encourage change, but real, genuine change comes only through the Spirit of God as He reveals Jesus Christ to us in a greater measure. Without the illumination and enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, we will never change our lives, our culture, or our theology. We must be taught.

In John 16, our Lord speaks about the Holy Spirit: "Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth. For he shall not speak of himself, but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak. And he will show you things to come. He shall glorify me, for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you. All things that the Father hath are mine. Therefore said I that he shall take of mine and will show it unto you." Here the Holy Spirit is referred to as the Spirit of truth. If we are ever to become more godly, more holy, and more biblically correct theologically speaking, it must be as the Holy Spirit enlightens and illuminates our minds so that we can understand God's revealed truth.

It is the Holy Spirit who illuminates our minds to the beauty and glory of the Lord Jesus Christ and to the truth of His Word. Have you ever noticed how we resist change? Have you ever noticed how you resist change? All of us do. Truthfully, most of us do not like change. Why?

Resistance to Change: Traditions and Idolatry

One answer is that we become very comfortable with ourselves, our practices, our lives, and our theology. We do not want anything to upset our apple cart, nor do we want additional work or study. We simply become comfortable.

Stephen was the first martyr in the New Testament. Do you know what he was charged with? In Acts chapter 6 and verse 16, here is one of the charges: “For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place and change the customs which Moses delivered unto us.” We will change the customs. We like our customs. We do not want to change. That is exactly what they were saying.

Do you realize that one of the most difficult things to change in your life, your Christian life, your church life, or your family life happens to be your customs or traditions? We have always done it like this, and we are comfortable doing it like this. It is still one of my favorite stories.

I read it a long time ago. A mother was fixing a roast, and she cut the end off and laid it in the pan beside the rest. Her little daughter, watching her, asked, "Why did you do that?" The mother said, "Well, I don't really know. I just always saw my mother do that." The little girl said, "Well, let's ask Granny and find out." They went to Granny and asked her why she always cut the end off the roast. She said, "Well, you know, I don't know either. I just saw my mother do it." Great-Granny was still alive, so they went to her and explained the situation. They asked, "Why did you always cut the end of your roast off?"

She said, "That's simple. My pan was too small for the roast." So you get a tradition going because somebody sees something done, or

because you do it a certain way regularly, and then you have that tradition.

Changes are exceedingly difficult when it comes to traditions and customs. When someone points out that our customs or traditions are unbiblical and unscriptural, we still do not like to change. Notice Matthew 15, beginning with verse 1: "Then came to Jesus scribes and Pharisees which were of Jerusalem, saying, 'Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders?'"

"For they wash not their hands when they eat bread. But he answered and said to them, 'Why do you also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?'"

These Pharisees were not concerned over sanitation. It was not for sanitary reasons that they washed their hands; it was a religious rite. Mark chapter 7 further explains it. Notice, beginning there with verse 1, and read through verse 9 carefully: "Then came together unto him the Pharisees and certain of the scribes which came from Jerusalem."

"When they saw some of his disciples eat bread with defiled," that is, with unwashed hands, "they found fault." There was a ceremonial ritual. Once they came from the market, they had to wash their hands, lest some germ of some gentile dog had gotten on them. It was all ceremonial.

"For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they wash their hands often eat not, holding the tradition of the elders. And when they come from the market, except they wash, they eat not. And many other things there be which they have received to hold, as the washing of cups, and pots, and brazen vessels, and of tables." Then the Pharisees and scribes asked him, "Why walk not thy disciples according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashed hands?"

"And he answered and said unto them, 'Well hath Isaiah prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups, and many other such like

things you do.'" And he said unto them, "Full well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your own tradition."

It is very difficult to deviate, discontinue, and turn from traditions and customs. When someone points out that something is unscriptural or unbiblical, it does not matter to most people, because they would rather have their tradition or custom than be biblically correct. It is hard to believe that we have been wrong for so many years, or that mother and dad, grandparents, and great-grandparents were wrong.

I remember when God first began opening my eyes to His truth. I heard someone teach the truth, and I opposed it. The reason was simple: if this brother, who was a professor, was right, not only was I wrong, but all my friends were wrong as well, and I did not want my friends to be wrong.

Once you grasp something, it is hard to say, "I've been taught wrongly all my life." You remember our Lord witnessing to the Samaritan woman in John chapter 4. She wanted to change the subject and said, "Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet. Our fathers worshipped in this mountain, that's Gerizim. But you say that in Jerusalem is where men ought to worship."

Change Is to Be Constant in the Christian

The woman at the well was saying, “We worship in this mountain. We have our tradition and our custom. You Jews have your customs and traditions; you worship over there, and we worship over here.” She wanted to return to customs, but our Lord said, “The time is coming when you neither worship in this mountain nor in Jerusalem. Why? For the Father seeketh such to worship Him who worship in spirit and in truth.”

This is one reason the Jews opposed Jesus Christ so viciously and vehemently: all those traditions were going down the drain. Here is another reason we do not like change. We are comfortable with our traditions and customs, but there is also an aspect of idolatry. Malachi 3:6 says, “I, the Lord, change not.” Only God is immutable, only God is unchangeable. Yet we like to think that we are right and everybody else is wrong.

There is no need for us to change because we are right. In other words, we are immutable; it is not possible for us to change because we are right. That is idolatry. We get into circumstances and situations with people, family, and friends, and ask, “Why does everything have to be so complex?” We notice the complexity of everything and say, “I wish things were simpler.”

Do you realize that only God is the most simple being? When we despise the complexity of our situations, we are saying that we would like to be God, in one sense of the word. We want everything to be simple all the time. Only God has no problems. We have problems, and there is an aspect of idolatry because we do not want to change; we think we are right and changeless like God. What was the temptation? “You shall be as gods, knowing or determining good and evil for yourself.”

The Constant Nature of Change in the Christian Life

Fourthly, change is to be constant in the Christian. When I speak of change, I mean biblical change. There is no reason to fear change. We should not deny it or run from it, but we must learn to change in a biblical manner. Our thoughts of God should become clearer, our devotion to Him more real, and our theology more sound. Our understanding of Him should increase daily. We should go from strength to strength, from faith to faith, and from glory to glory and grace to grace.

In 2 Corinthians 3:18, Scripture says, “But we all,” that is, we all Christians, “with open face beholding as in a glass or in a mirror the glory of the Lord.” We look there and see the Lord in His glory. As we view Him, we are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord. We are to be continually beholding the glory of the Lord and, consequently, continually changed by the Spirit of God. The Bible says in Psalm 84:7, “They go from strength to strength. Every one of them in Zion appeareth before God.” In Romans 1:17, it says, “For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith. As it is written, The just shall live by faith.”

It is incumbent upon us to change our lives and bring them into greater conformity to the Lord Jesus Christ and to His Word.

Here is the fifth truth: we will change. However, that change may be for the better or for the worse. You cannot avoid change. If you are not going forward in the faith, you are going backward. If you are not progressing, you are digressing. There is no neutrality. You cannot put your life in neutral and simply sit there.

There is no stationary place. Our Lord said in Luke 11:23, "He that is not with Me is against Me, and he that gathers not scattereth abroad." You are either for Him or against Him; either gathering or scattering; either progressing in the faith, or digressing, retreating, and backing up. If you are not becoming more biblical, you are becoming more emotional, sentimental, traditional, ceremonial, pragmatic, pharisaic, and humanistic.

The only alternative to conforming your life to Jesus Christ is conforming your life to the world. Paul wrote in Romans 12, "I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, wholly acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service, and be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." If you are not transformed by the renewing of your mind, you are becoming conformed to the world. The only choice is conformity to Jesus Christ or conformity to the world.

Application: Change is Essential for Growth

You will change one way or the other. You will either become more godly, more holy, more obedient, and more biblical, or you will keep going backward, becoming increasingly conformed to the world. Over the years, I have seen people become upset with the preacher, the preaching, or some family, and then begin missing Sunday night, Wednesday night, and Sunday morning. Before long, they are not coming back. If you are not going forward, you are going backward.

Change is absolutely essential to growth. If you are not growing, you are dying; if you are not increasing in strength, you are growing weaker. Change is inevitable, and you will change. It will either be for better or for worse. To go backward is to fall under the curse of Galatians that you read about in Galatians chapter 5. It is basically declaring yourself unfit for the Kingdom of God.

Hebrews 10:38 says, “Now the just shall live by faith. But if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.” The just shall live by faith, but if any man draws back, God has no pleasure in him. In Luke 9:62, Jesus said, “No man, having put his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.” You cannot put your hand to the gospel plow, look back, and desire what you had when you were unconverted. If you look back, he said, you are not fit for the kingdom of God.

Our lives have changed. Repentance is a change. Conversion is a change. Sanctification is a change, and glorification is the ultimate change. We will be changeless only when we are in eternity. Until then, we must continually change for the better—to be more biblical, holy, godly, and scriptural.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to thee this day. We thank you for your word and your truth. We understand, Lord, that we are creatures of change. Help us, Father, to change biblically for your honor and glory, and to do that which is well-pleasing in thy sight. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 4

The Theology of Change - 4

Introduction and Review

This is the fourth message in The Theology of Change. Colossians 3:10 says, “And have put on the new man which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him.” Ephesians 4:24 gives a similar statement: “And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.” So far, we have been looking at the theology of change.

In the first two messages, I dealt with a conviction versus a preference. I showed at least four tests that demonstrate whether or not we hold a preference or a conviction. Those tests dealt with pleasure, profit, pressure, and persecution. Last week I pointed out that Scripture teaches us indeed that we will change because change is an absolute necessity. We are going to change whether we want to or not. We are either going forward or going backward. We will either progress in the faith or digress. We cannot remain neutral, and we cannot remain stationary. We are going to change either for the better or for the worse.

Renewed in Knowledge After the Image of God

In one sense of the word, there should not be any ignorant Christians. The reason I say that is because Colossians 3:10 says that we have “put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge, after the image of him that created him.” If you look at verse 11, it says, “Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all.”

It really does not matter who you are or where you are. If you have been saved by the grace of God, then you have been renewed in knowledge. When God saves someone, He renews us in knowledge.

The interesting thing about the word renewed here is that it is the Greek word anakainoo, which literally means to renew, to cause to grow up new, to make new, to be changed from one kind of life to another, or to change from that which is right from a corrupt estate. We are renewed in our knowledge; we have been given new knowledge. Once you have been saved, you have been changed. According to Scripture, that change should be constant and continual in your life.

Yes, your theology should change as well. It changes in that it becomes a deeper understanding and appreciation of the Word of God, and it should also change in the sense that we are able to make applications of our theology to every area and every sphere of life.

Adam's Pre-Fall Knowledge

Since we are renewed in our knowledge, Colossians 3:10 implies a connection with the knowledge that Adam held before the fall. When the fall occurred, man's knowledge became perverted in one sense, and in another sense that knowledge actually became lost. Paul writes in Ephesians 4:17-19, "This I say therefore, and testify of the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them because of the blindness of their heart: who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness."

Since the fall, man's mind is totally alienated from God, totally ignorant of God, and blind toward God.

When you read Colossians 3:10, which tells us that we are renewed in knowledge, you cannot help but think of the knowledge Adam possessed before the fall. Genesis 2:19–20 shows what Adam was really doing when he named the animals: “And out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air, and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them. And whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof. And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found an help meet, or suitable for him.”

Adam was not looking at a cow and saying, “Well, she’s stubborn, I’ll just call her old bossy,” or looking at a pig and saying, “I’m just going to call him Arnold.” He was not doing that at all. Adam was reading out of those animals the very purpose for which God created them.

Francis Nigel Lee, in his book The Central Significance of Culture, stated that Adam was literally scientifically classifying the animals. Practically every commentator makes the same basic point: Adam was reading the will of God out of every one of those creatures and naming them accordingly.

John Trapp, the old Puritan, said that this was “a sign of his sovereignty or dominion,” meaning Adam’s dominion and sovereignty because God placed him over all those animals. He also called it “a sign of his sovereignty, an argument also of his wisdom in giving them names according to their natures.” Adam therefore read out of those animals the very nature in which God had created them.

Matthew Poole says it like this: “In giving him names, he considered their several natures and perfections.” Adam Clarke goes further: “Adam gave names, but how? From an intimate knowledge of the nature and properties of each creature. Here we see the perfection of his knowledge. For it is well known that the names affixed to the different animals in Scripture always express some prominent feature and essential characteristic of the creatures to which they are applied. Had he not possessed an intuitive knowledge

of the grand and distinguishing properties of those animals, he never could have given them such names. This one circumstance is a strong proof of the original perfection and excellence of man while in a state of innocence."

"Nor need we wonder at the account. Adam was the work of an infinitely wise and perfect being, and the effect must resemble the cause that produced it." Adam was not a caveman or a dummy. He was exceedingly brilliant. He had an intuitive knowledge of the will of God, not only for himself, but for these creatures as well. Thus he named them according to their properties and according to the nature that God created in them.

All of this knowledge was lost after the fall. In one sense it became perverted; in another, it was lost or totally rejected. Romans 1 tells us about this perversion: "Because when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful, but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things. Wherefore God gave them up." They did not like to retain the knowledge of God; they changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image. Verse 28 states it clearly: "And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind to do those things which are not convenient."

The Perversion and Rejection of Knowledge

So they not only perverted that knowledge; they totally rejected anything in relationship to God.

Now, I want you to understand something about Adam's knowledge. Adam's knowledge was not just simply an accumulation of facts. It was not knowledge for knowledge's sake. It was intensely theological. His knowledge had reverence to God, His will, and His purpose. Adam knew the will of God not only for himself, but also for those animals that God created.

The Danger of Knowledge for Knowledge's Sake

So, that brings me to this point: knowledge just for knowledge's sake is worthless. Scholarship just for scholarship's sake is worthless. You can have a multitude of degrees behind your name, and you may know a lot of facts, and you may have a lot of head knowledge, but if you do not know how to apply those facts and apply that knowledge, especially if you do not know how it relates to God, His will, and His purpose, then your knowledge and your scholarship are absolutely worthless.

Moreover, the Scripture teaches that such knowledge is nothing more than vanity and pride. In 1 Corinthians 8:1–2, Paul says, "Now as touching things offered unto idols, we know that we all have knowledge." But then he says, "Knowledge puffeth up, but charity or love edifieth. And if any man think that he knoweth anything, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know."

Knowledge or scholarship simply for its own sake creates pride, arrogance, and presumption. Interestingly, when Paul says, "knowledge puffeth up," he uses the Greek word phusioo, which literally means to blow up, puff up, inflate, cause to swell up, make proud, and bear oneself loftily, arrogantly, and proudly. Knowledge, just for knowledge's sake, blows somebody up in pride. Such arrogance and pride are normally perceived in certain individuals.

When I was a boy, we would call such an individual "Mr. Know-it-all." He did not care about anyone or anything; he only wanted to show what he knew and how much he knew. This is why the Apostle Paul says, "knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth."

Now, note someone who has knowledge just for knowledge's sake, someone who is puffed up in this way. They have to demonstrate their superiority. They demonstrate their knowledge by mocking anyone who disagrees with them or does not know as much as they do about a subject. They have to mock them and ridicule them. They seek to disparage them in any way if they will not submit to them and acknowledge that they are the Mr. Know-it-all, the superior individual.

Paul goes on to explain that once we have reached the apex—the height of pride, arrogance, and presumption—and think that we

have arrived, believing that we are number one and have it all, then, as he says in verse 2, “And if any man think that he knoweth anything, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know.” If you think you have got it, you do not. You know nothing as you ought to know.

There is a condemnation in the Bible for knowledge merely for knowledge’s sake. Knowledge puffeth up; that is, it creates pride. One of the seven things that God hates is pride. Proverbs 6:16 says, “These six things doth the Lord hate, yea, seven are an abomination unto him,” and the first is a proud look. Proverbs 21:4 says, “A high look and a proud heart and the plowing of the wicked is sin.” God despises pride. When we seek knowledge simply to impress everyone with what we know, He says that we do not know anything as we ought to know.

Adam's Maturity and Responsibility

Now, consider several things based upon Colossians 3:10, where the Bible says that we are “renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created you.” This harks back to Adam. First, Adam was created full grown; he was never a baby and never had to grow up. Second, when God created Adam, he was immediately given responsibilities. He had to tend, keep, and guard the garden. He had to work.

Some say that work is a product of the fall. No. Work was before the fall; it only became onerous afterward. God gave Adam work, and to fulfill his responsibilities Adam needed knowledge. He had to know how to apply what God had given him if he was going to rule and exercise dominion. He needed to know how to garden, when to plant, how to prune, and how to water—everything about gardening. If he was going to protect and keep the animals, he had to know everything about those animals that he could possibly know.

Obviously, Adam had to have knowledge. When God created Adam, He created him not only with knowledge, but He gave him responsibilities, and there is indeed a biblical work ethic. When you and I revolt against work and responsibility, it is a revolt against maturity. We're refusing to grow up.

I've always been amazed at some people. I have seen women in their sixties and over flaunting a miniskirt and a see-through blouse.

I thought, what? They think they want to be a teeny-bopper or something like that. No! It is just like a grown man who refuses to work. That is a sign of immaturity, not maturity.

What God is telling us is that we may have come into this world as babies, but we're not to stay babies. I will confess this: There is only one area in the Bible where God says that we may legitimately and lawfully remain as babes. In 1 Corinthians 14:20, He says, "Be not children in understanding, howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men."

You can be a little child in malice. What does that mean? It is like children playing: one of them stumbles or gets pushed down, and he runs in and says, "Momma, Momma, Johnny pushed me down." She says, "It'll be alright, son. Just go back outside and play." Three minutes later, they're hugging necks and playing again. It is all gone; it is all over with. So God said, in malice you can be children, but in understanding you must be men.

The Process of Renewal: From Gnosis to Epignosis

Since we're talking about growing up and becoming men, consider Ephesians 4:11-15: "And He gave some apostles and some prophets and some evangelists and some pastor-teachers. Why? For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God unto a perfect man, or a mature man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, that we henceforth be no more children tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine by the slight of men and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive."

"But speaking the truth in love may grow up into him in all things, who is the head, even Christ." The truth is that we cannot grow until we have been regenerated and converted. But once we have been regenerated and converted, we are renewed in righteousness, holiness, and knowledge. Our renewal is the basis for growth.

In Colossians 3:10, when the Bible tells us that we are to be renewed in knowledge, the Greek word is anakainoo. It literally means to renew, to cause to grow up, to make new, and to be

changed into a new kind of life. So how do we do that? Look in Romans 12:1–2:

"I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."

Interestingly, the word renewed in Romans 12:2 and the word renewed in Colossians 3:10 are exactly the same. How, then, are we to be renewed? Verse 2 tells us that we are first to be renewed negatively, by not being conformed to this world. The word conformed literally means to be pressed into a mold. Do not come out a little worldling; do not come out a little humanist. That is what he is saying. Do not let the world press you into this little mold. How, then, do you keep from being pressed into the mold?

He says, "Be ye transformed." The word transformed is where we get our English word metamorphosis. A butterfly goes through metamorphosis; it goes through stages. Literally, verse 2 says, "…and be not conformed to this world, but be you metamorphosized." How? By the renewing of your mind. As you learn to think the thoughts of God, to think biblically and scripturally, and to bring your life into conformity with that, you will prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

We need to be constantly renewing and renovating our minds, changing them so that we become more and more biblical and godly. Change, in one sense of the word, should always take place daily. If you are reading your Bible and see truth, and God opens your eyes, you should change at that point. You should learn to apply that truth to your life.

The Scripture tells us that we are to go from faith to faith, from strength to strength, and from glory to glory. In order to do that, there must be a starting point, a place of beginning. That starting point is the knowledge we now possess, and it is to be developed into fuller, more accurate, and more precise knowledge.

Let me show you where most people are theologically. Look in your Bibles to Mark, chapter 8, beginning with verse 22. Watch

carefully: “And he cometh to Bethsaida, and they bring a blind man unto him, and besought him to touch him. And he took the blind man by the hand, and led him out of town.” Have you ever wondered why Jesus took this blind man and led him out of town? Why did He not heal him in town? He came to Bethsaida, and Bethsaida was under the curse of God. He said, “Woe unto thee, Bethsaida.” Therefore, He was not going to perform the work in Bethsaida; He took the man by the hand and led him out of town.

Notice verse 23: “He took the blind man by the hand, led him out of the town, and when he had spit on his eyes and put his hands upon him, he asked him if he saw aught.”

"And he looked up and said, I see men as trees walking." He saw, but not clearly—not precisely, not accurately. He saw forms. He could not tell whether it was a man or a tree or what, but he could see; he just did not see clearly. Watch verse 25: "After that, he put his hands again upon his eyes and made him look up and he was restored and saw every man clearly."

That is exactly where most Christians are. They do not see clearly, accurately, or precisely. They see men as trees walking. Our goal should be to have the most accurate and precise understanding of our Lord and His Word as possible. It is possible to have a more accurate and precise knowledge of God in His Word by His grace and by His power.

Once we have it, we are to apply it to every situation in our lives. So, let me break this down for you. What is our point of beginning? What is our starting point? Let me answer that for you: we are to go from gnosis to epignosis.

Now, you are going to say, what in the world is that? It happens to be two Greek words. Gnosis is the Greek word for knowledge. That word knowledge occurs 28 times in our Bible. The verb is ginosko, which is “I know.” It occurs 223 times in the Bible. So gnosis is knowledge.

Gnosticism and the Nature of Knowledge

Perhaps you have heard or read of a sect known as the Gnostics. The Gnostics took their name from the Greek word gnosis because they

taught salvation by a special knowledge. You had to be in their group, and you had to have their secrets in order to really be saved. The truth of the matter is that there were two different kinds of Gnostics: the Docetic Gnostics and the Corinthian Gnostics. The Docetic Gnostics are condemned, and the Corinthian Gnostics are condemned as well. John particularly wrote against the Docetic Gnostics in 1 John, and Paul wrote against the Gnostics in the book of Colossians as well. But I want you to look at 1 John very quickly. I am going to explain something to you, and see if you can figure this one out. Look in 1 John, chapter 1. It is interesting what John writes: 1 John 1 and verse 1.

He says, "That which was from the beginning," talking about Jesus Christ, "that which was from the beginning which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled of the Word of life." Why did John say, "We handled Him"? The answer is because of Gnosticism. The Docetic Gnostics believed that matter was inherently evil. This table would be evil; this body would be evil. Therefore, they said Jesus Christ did not have a real body. Dokeo is the Greek word which means "I appear." In other words, they said Jesus Christ was a divine apparition, a mirage. He did not have a real, literal, physical body because that would be material, and material was sinful. John said He has a real, literal, fleshly body. We have not only heard Him and seen Him; we have handled Him. We have touched Him. He is real flesh and blood. When you read that, it is against the Docetic Gnostics.

The Corinthian Gnostics had a somewhat different attitude. They said, "Yes, matter is inherently evil, but it will perish. It will be destroyed. Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die." Their attitude was, "Let's live it up because we are going to die anyhow."

The word gnosis is a good Greek word because it simply refers to knowledge. However, it refers to what we would call general, elementary, or rudimentary knowledge. When it is used in the Bible, it speaks of knowledge in a general sense: knowledge of that which is lawful and unlawful, a general knowledge of right and wrong, and a general knowledge of divine things. Thus, when you are talking about gnosis, you are talking about something general, elementary,

and sometimes abstract. That is gnosis. The second word is epignosis.

Gnosis and epignosis are the same word, with an epi on the front. What is the difference? The little word epi is a preposition. It literally means upon, in, or unto. If gnosis is knowledge, then epignosis would be knowledge unto knowledge, knowledge upon knowledge, or knowledge into a more precise and accurate knowledge. The word epignosis demonstrates a far more accurate and precise knowledge than someone who simply has gnosis. I will show you more about this next week.

Gnosis is knowledge, but it is elementary. It is the ABCs; it is two plus two equals four. It may also be called knowledge in the abstract, in the sense that we may have it, but we are not exactly sure how to apply it. We do not know exactly what to do with it. We do not understand the purpose and will of God in light of what we know.

In 2 Peter 1:2, the Bible says, “Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.” The word knowledge is epignosis, the precise, accurate, or fuller knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through that precise, accurate, or fuller knowledge. So if we want grace and peace to be multiplied unto us, it requires knowledge—a fuller knowledge, not merely our ABCs, but a fuller knowledge of God.

Every Christian starts with gnosis, which is simply general knowledge. In fact, the Gospel is gnosis; it is general knowledge. Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, described John's ministry in Luke 1:76–79: “And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the highest, for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways, to give knowledge of salvation to His people by the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God, whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in the darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet in the way of peace.”

In verse 77, he says, “To give knowledge,” to give the gnosis of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins. The only thing that anyone can give, even the most educated and erudite

scholar or preacher who has ever lived, is what we would call gnosis—a general and elementary knowledge. That is all we can give. We can declare that truth.

The Necessity of Applying Knowledge

There is a problem with this general knowledge: it may be perverted, or it may be withheld. In Luke 11:52, our Lord says, "Woe unto you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge, the key of gnosis. You entered not in yourselves, and them that were entering in you hindered." This elementary knowledge can be perverted or hidden. He condemns these lawyers for taking away the key of knowledge. They would not enter in, and they hindered others who were entering in themselves.

It is absolutely necessary that each of us understands the importance of knowledge. Knowledge should not be disdained in any shape, form, or fashion, even if it is what we would call elementary knowledge. However, in acquiring knowledge, we must understand that knowledge does us no good unless we know how to apply it. Proverbs 4:7 says, "Wisdom is the principal thing. Therefore, get wisdom. And with all thy getting, get understanding."

I could know all day long that two plus two is four, but if I do not know how to apply it, it does me no good. I can know several truths of Scripture, but if I do not know how to apply them, they are not doing me one bit of good.

Our point of beginning is the knowledge we now have, our gnosis. It is to be a steppingstone to a fuller, more accurate, and more precise knowledge of God. Once we have our starting place, our theology, our understanding, and our relationship with our Father will be greatly improved. We will know Him better, love Him more, and worship Him more attentively. We are to progress from gnosis to what we would call epignosis—a fuller, more precise, and accurate knowledge.

Restoration in Christ and Conformity to His Image

Now, let me make some applications. It is true that we lost everything in Adam. The Bible teaches in 1 Corinthians chapter 15

that Adam was our federal head and our representative. So what Adam did, we did. When he sinned, we sinned. When he fell, we fell because we were in him. When he became corrupt and depraved and deprived of knowledge and holiness and righteousness, so did we.

But here's the good news. Jesus Christ, in 1 Corinthians 15, is called the second man. He's called the last Adam. We gained far more in Jesus Christ than we ever lost in Adam. This verse, by the way, is quoted in the New Testament concerning Jesus Christ Himself, especially in John 15, I think it's verse 25. Psalm 69, verse 4, says, "They that hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of mine head. They that would destroy me being mine enemies wrongfully are mighty." Notice this phrase: "Then I restored that which I took not away."

Our Lord did not take away the knowledge and righteousness and holiness, but He restored it. That's why the Bible says we're created in righteousness and holiness, and we're renewed in the knowledge of Him that created us. So, our Lord restored that which He took not away. In Jesus Christ, our knowledge has been renewed. Moreover, He brought us back to the Father. The Bible tells us in 1 Peter 3, verse 18, that Christ also suffered for our sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God. So, here's what happened. In Adam, we ran from God. In Jesus Christ, we run to Him. In Adam, we lost everything. In Jesus Christ, we gained everything.

Like Martha, we have to sit at His feet and learn to be changed into His image. I could tell you the will of God for each one of you today—not in every specific detail, perhaps, but in general. It is found in Romans 8:29: “For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.” It is God’s will that we be conformed to the image of His Son. We are not to be pressed into the mold of the world, but into the image of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The theology of change relates to the fact that we are changing more and more into the image of Jesus Christ. We are becoming more biblical, more holy, more godly, and more obedient. It is only by His Spirit and through His Word that He will give us a fuller, more accurate, and precise understanding, teaching us so that we may prove what is that good, acceptable, and perfect will of God.

Conclusion: All Things of, Through, and to God

Romans 11:36 is one short verse, but one so packed it is unbelievable: “For of him and through him and to him are all things to whom be glory forever. Amen.” “Of him,” that is, originally; “through him,” providentially; and “to him,” ultimately, are all things. If everything is of Him, He must teach us. If everything is through Him, we must come to Him. If everything is unto Him, it is to be for His honor, glory, and praise.

If we are going to change theologically, if we are going to change our lives, it has to be for the child of God into a more precise, accurate, and fuller understanding of God and His Word, of our relationship to Him, and of how His will and purpose apply to everything in life. I sat on our porch the other day, just for a few minutes, watching the little hummingbirds at the feeder. I’ve teased Alice.

I said, “She’ll ask me what I want for supper.” I told her I thought I wanted a plate full of hummingbird legs. Can you imagine how many hummingbird legs you would have to eat just to get one bite? I would not eat a hummingbird; I was only teasing her. But I watched those things and could not help thinking that God has a purpose for those hummingbirds. Maybe it is for our pleasure or enjoyment.

He does tell us to go to the birds and learn. There are many things we can learn from them, but everything, once you understand this, relates to God. Everything has a purpose. When you gain a fuller, more accurate, and more precise understanding of these things, you begin to see how everything interlocks and relates to God, His Word, and His will.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee this day. We thank You for Your truth and Your Word. We pray that You would teach us, build us up in the most holy faith, and grant us a deeper, fuller, more accurate, and precise understanding. Teach us to be mature men and women in Jesus Christ. In Thy name we pray, Amen.

CHAPTER 5

Theology of Change

Part Five of Five

Review of Previous Messages

Ephesians 3 and Ephesians 4. This is going to be the fifth and final message on the theology of change. Colossians chapter 3 and verse 10. I want you to note what the Bible says. Colossians 3 and verse 10: "And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him." Then in Ephesians 4 and verse 24, the Bible says, "And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." Let me just remind you that so far in the previous four messages, what I have shared with you—the first two messages actually dealt with the difference between a preference and a conviction. And I shared with you how those two are vastly different. You might prefer something, but you will change if the conditions are right. A conviction, of course, you will not change. And I gave you four tests that would determine whether or not we hold preferences or convictions. There was the test of profit. There was the test of pleasure. There was the test of pressure. There was the test also of persecution. And, of course, even

under profit I also included the test of poverty because these things, of course, will indeed test us and reveal what we really hold and what we really believe as well. And the third message I pointed out how the change is absolutely necessary and that we will change regardless whether we want to change or not. We will either change for the better and go forward or we will change for the worse and go backwards. But I pointed out the many changes that we have in our Christian life: how repentance is a change, conversion is a change, sanctification is a change, glorification is the ultimate change. And so, until we are glorified, we're to be constantly and consistently changing our lives and our understanding and our theology in the sense that we're to grow more biblical, more holy, and more godly, and our understanding should, of course, reach a better degree, especially in reference to our theology as well. We begin to understand how to apply the knowledge that God has given us. In the fourth message, I distinguished for you between the two words gnosis and epignosis, and I'm going to take just a few minutes and review that today since those were two strange words. And I pointed out actually how this is our starting point for change when we go from gnosis to epignosis. Gnosis is just simply the Greek word for knowledge. That's it.

Gnosis: Elementary Knowledge

It occurs 28 times in our Bible; one time it is interpreted as science, that would be 29 times. The Greek word ginosko, the verb "I know," occurs 223 times. This is where the early sect, the Gnostics, derived their name. They believed and taught that there was a special salvation that they only possessed because they had this secret knowledge, and in order to be genuinely saved you had to have the knowledge of the Gnostics. There were the Docetic Gnostics and the Corinthian Gnostics, both condemned in the Bible: the book of Colossians as well as the book of 1 John against the Gnostics. The Docetic Gnostics, from the Greek word dokeo which means "I appear," denied the humanity of Jesus Christ because they said that anything material is evil, so Jesus could not have had a real literal physical body. They said he was a divine apparition, a mirage, not real; he just appeared to be real. That's why in 1 John, John said, "We have seen him, we've heard him, and our hands have handled

him." So he's not just a spirit; he is real, he is genuine. So you have this, not this gnosis. And you could say that gnosis basically is what you and I would call elementary knowledge or rudimentary knowledge. The next word is epignosis, the same word with a preposition epi, which means "upon," or "unto," or "into." So actually epignosis means knowledge into knowledge, or knowledge actually upon knowledge. And it is described in the Bible, I'm going to show you, as a more precise, and a more accurate, and even a fuller knowledge. So again let me just say it like this: gnosis would be elementary knowledge.

It would be your ABCs, it would be 2 plus 2—that which is simple, plain, and what any Christian should know. But when you get to epignosis, it comes as a more precise knowledge. Last week I quoted 2 Peter 1:2: "Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God and our Lord Jesus Christ." The word knowledge there is epignosis, not just gnosis. So grace and peace is to be multiplied to us through the fuller, more accurate, more precise knowledge of God. Let me begin today by making one truth very plainly, and then I will give you the second truth. The first is this: there is no room to despise knowledge in the Bible, not even that which you and I would call elementary knowledge. Not any knowledge is even under what you and I would call gnosis.

We all have the same starting point. It doesn't matter what discipline you are learning; everyone starts at the same point—ground zero. You know nothing about it or very little about it, and then you begin to learn and add learning upon learning. The truth is we all begin as babes in Jesus Christ. Just like we begin as babes physically, we also begin as babes spiritually. We should mature physically and spiritually as well. When a Christian has been regenerated and converted by the grace of God, he is not like Adam created full-grown. He's a babe in Jesus Christ. There is no Christian that is converted that automatically has perfect knowledge and perfect understanding. We're all babes in Jesus Christ. So we have to grow not just physically but spiritually as well. As we grow older in the faith, we learn to perceive and appreciate knowledge and understanding. In fact, the older we get, the more we appreciate knowledge.

We were building a little building and I had a young man who was helping me, who was a builder himself and very smart. In fact, his father is a dear friend of mine. And we were putting up this OSB board. And so I said, "I'll tell you what let's do. I said, let's screw a 2x4 on the bottom there and let's just set the OSB board on the 2x4, that way we won't have to hold it." He looked at me, he said, "You like to work smart, don't you?" I said, "Yes." He said, "You're not like my daddy." I said, "And the reason I'm a lot like your daddy is because your daddy tells you to do it and you have to hold it. I said, I don't want to have to hold it. Let's put the 2x4 down there."

So, you know, the truth of the matter is you learn to appreciate knowledge. The Bible says in the book of Proverbs chapter 18 verse 15, "The heart of the prudent getteth knowledge and the ear of the wise seeketh knowledge." So if you're wise, said God, you're going to get knowledge. If you're prudent, you're going to get knowledge. In Proverbs 19 in verse 2, he said also that "the soul be without knowledge, it is not good, and he that hasteth with his feet sinneth."

Now, what I want to do is repeat just a couple of scriptures that I gave you last week just so I can build upon them. So, remember if you would please in Colossians 3 and verse 10, I'm going to come back here. He said, "We put on the new man which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him." But I want you to look back in your Bibles to the book of Luke chapter 1, Luke chapter 1. Notice if you would beginning there with verse 76. This is where Zechariah the father of John the Baptist is describing John's ministry that he's going to have. John has just been born. So in Luke 1 in verse 76, Zechariah the father says, "And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the

Now, when you look at verse 77, Zechariah said that part of the ministry of John the Baptist was to give knowledge of salvation to his people. Now the word knowledge there is simply the word gnosis. And I pointed out last week in reality that is the only thing that anyone can give that is elementary truth in that sense of the word. And John's message was an elementary message. John did convey knowledge. He did preach repentance and he did point out Jesus Christ as the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world. And yet the truth is the knowledge that John conveyed and the

knowledge that he held was limited. And in one sense of the word you could say it was also elementary. It was a starting point. Because there was no salvation apart from repentance. And there was no salvation apart from Jesus Christ. But let me show you what I mean by a starting point. I want you to look in your Bibles to the book of Hebrews chapter 6 and verse 1. Hebrews chapter 6 and verse 1. And this verse has been greatly misunderstood by a number of people, but yet it is a very simple verse to understand. But I want you to look at verse one of Hebrews chapter six. "Therefore, leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection"—or to maturity—"not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God." Now, when you look at that verse, you read it: "Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection." Is the author of the book of Hebrews saying if you want to be perfect, if you want to be mature, just forget the principles of Jesus Christ?

The Necessity and Limitation of Elementary Knowledge

Of course, he's not saying that. You have to understand the word principles. He said, "Therefore leaving the principles"—the Greek word arche, which refers to a point of beginning, a starting place, or the first steps from one's place. So he says this: "Therefore leaving the elementary or the first stages of your understanding of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection or maturity." Then he clarifies it: "Not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God." In other words, I ought not to have to come in here every Sunday and preach salvation, or tell you that sinners must repent, or that Jesus Christ is the only Savior and Lord. That's elementary, rudimentary knowledge. You should know this. So he is saying you should go on from gnosis to epignosis. John's ministry was basically a point of beginning. He did convey knowledge, but not what you and I would call a full, complete, or more precise knowledge. All knowledge in one sense is elementary because we learn in succession, one thing after another; none of us understand the totality of anything once and for all. Let me show you what I'm talking about. Look back in your Bibles to Acts chapter 18, verse 24: "And a certain Jew named Apollos, born in Alexandria, an

eloquent man and mighty in the scriptures, came to Ephesus. And this man was instructed in the way of the Lord, and being fervent in spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John. That's all he knew. And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue, whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly." In other words, all Apollos knew was what John taught and preached. There was more truth, fuller truth, more precise and accurate truth since the ministry of John. But he didn't know that. So Aquila and Priscilla took him and explained in more and fuller details concerning Jesus Christ.

Now look in Acts chapter 19: "And it came to pass that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coast came to Ephesus and finding certain disciples he said unto them, 'Have you received the Holy Ghost since—or when—you believed?' And they said unto him, 'We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost.' We don't know who the Holy Ghost is.

And he said to them, "Unto what then were you baptized?" And they said, "Unto John's baptism." That's all we know. Then said Paul, "John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is on Christ Jesus." And when they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. In other words, all they knew was what John the Baptist conveyed, which was elementary truth. There was more truth that God revealed after that.

You have to understand this simple principle. Our knowledge, whether it is great or small, is only made effectual by God alone. We are responsible for the proclamation of the truth of God, the Word of God, but not for the results which it produces. God can use it to convert and bring repentance, or he can use it to harden people and drive them from the faith. Our responsibility is to proclaim that which we know. I talked to a dear brother the other day, and he said, "You know, sometimes I'm just so afraid I'm going to convey some wrong information." And I told him, "Look, you are not responsible for what you don't know, you're responsible for what you do know. You convey what you do know, and God will give you light further

on, and then you can add to that. But whatever we have and whatever we know, it's God who makes it effectual."

That's why in 2 Corinthians 2:14, the Apostle Paul said, "Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savor of his knowledge by us in every place." And then in 2 Corinthians 4:6, he says, "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

Now let me just point this out. Elementary knowledge is absolutely needed and necessary so that we can live peacefully and practically. Look in your Bibles to Romans chapter 15, verse 14. Look what the Apostle Paul said to these Roman Christians: "And I myself also am persuaded of you, my brethren, that you are also full of goodness, filled with all knowledge"—that is gnosis—"able also to admonish one another." You have to know elementary truth in order to admonish each other.

How could I correct Steve or Steve correct me without elementary and rudimentary knowledge? We have to know what's right and wrong, what's scriptural and not. The Apostle Paul said, "Look, you Romans, you all have elementary knowledge, and that elementary knowledge is sufficient, according to verse 14, that you may be able to admonish or exhort or rebuke each other."

Then there's another verse we never really learned: 1 Peter 3:7, where the word is gnosis as well. "Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them"—the wives—"according to knowledge, giving honor unto the wife as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers be not hindered." Even God says you have to have some basic elementary knowledge to live with a wife. You have to know biblical truths, creation differences, and a lot of things, he says, to live peacefully and practically.

Even though we might have elementary or basic rudimentary knowledge, we should always be seeking to add to it. The Apostle Paul said in Philippians 3:8, "Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things and do count them but

dung, that I may know him." Listen: "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge," even the gnosis, the elementary knowledge concerning the Lord Jesus Christ. He said, "I'm willing to give anything, suffer anything, lose anything just to gain more knowledge concerning Jesus Christ." That's why Colossians 2:3 says concerning Jesus Christ, "In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." Anything worth knowing or learning is worth knowing or learning in Jesus Christ.

Warning Against a Mere Form of Knowledge

The problem is this: so many people equate knowledge with facts. When it comes to Jesus Christ, there's a big difference between knowing Jesus Christ and knowing facts about him. Even an unsaved man can say Jesus was born, died, was buried, arose from the dead, and ascended into heaven. Those are facts; anybody can know and say them. But just because you know facts does not mean you know him. The Apostle Paul said in 2 Timothy 1:12, "For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless"

Paul declared, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day." He did not say, "I know the facts about in whom I believe." He said, "I know him. I know him. I know him." Many people know facts, but they do not know Jesus Christ. There is a vast difference between knowing about Christ and knowing Jesus Christ.

Since you are in Romans, look back to chapter 2 for a warning. We cannot be like those wicked individuals whom Paul describes as having only a form of knowledge. In Romans 2:17–20, he says, "Behold, thou art called a Jew, and restest in the law, and makest thy boast of God, and knowest his will, and approvest the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law; and art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which hast a form of knowledge and of the truth of the law." What did Paul just say? You have a form of knowledge. You think you know, but you really don't know. A form of knowledge is merely a semblance of knowledge; it is not real knowledge.

I'll give you an illustration. I was sitting in church one day when a Hispanic couple came in and sat right down behind me. I was on the front row. They began speaking in Spanish. I sat and listened for a few minutes, then turned around and said, "La Biblia es la palabra de Dios. Yo tengo una amiga que me ama, su nombre es Jesús." They said, "Those are the only two sentences I know in Spanish."

And all I said was "The Bible is the word of God. I have a friend who loves me whose name is Jesus." That's all I said, and they assumed that I understood everything they were saying, but I did not understand a word of it. So I gave them a form, a semblance, and they fell for the bait. They thought I understood them when I did not. A form of knowledge may possess facts, but it does not know how to relate those facts to God or to practical living. It is knowledge that one simply seems to have, but there is no application of it in his life. Such foolishness leads to the destruction of lives, not only those who claim to possess the knowledge, but also those whom they influence.

In fact, in Luke 11:52, our Lord said, "Woe unto you, lawyers! for ye have taken away the key of knowledge: ye entered not in yourselves, and them that were entering in ye hindered." So when you have a form of knowledge and you really don't understand what you're talking about, it's going to lead to your own destruction and the destruction of others.

In light of these passages, let me emphasize this truth again. Biblical knowledge is given unto us so that our lives will become more holy, more godly, more obedient, and more righteous. If one boasts of knowledge, especially biblical knowledge, and he does not live a godly, biblical, obedient life, according to 1 Corinthians 8:1, he is puffed up, full of pride, arrogant, haughty, high-minded, and he knows nothing as he ought to know. And 2 Timothy 3:7 talks about those who are ever learning, but never able to come to a knowledge of truth. You do know there are people that are professional students, don't you? They just go to school all their lives.

We used to tease our oldest daughter. She got her master's degree, and I'm thankful for that, but I would say, "Sweetheart, don't ever become a professional student now." But there are people who just want to keep learning, and there is nothing wrong with learning as

long as you know how to apply it and use it. But just knowledge for knowledge's sake is absolutely worthless. So we cannot despise knowledge if knowledge is going to be used, even if it is elementary.

The Call to Change: From Gnosis to Epignosis

Here is the second truth today. We must ask: how are we to change our knowledge? How are we to change our theology? The answer is that we are to move from an elementary knowledge to a fuller, more precise, and more accurate knowledge. We move from gnosis to epignosis. As our understanding and comprehension increase, we embrace the fuller and more complete truth given through the study of the Word of God by the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit. We do not change our theology because of pleasure, profit, poverty, pressure, or persecution. We only change through the study of the Word of God and the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit.

Now, I want to show you three passages before I show you some other passages that really deal with what I would call the difference between gnosis and epignosis. Turn in your Bibles, first of all, to Matthew chapter 14, and begin with verse 35. Each of these passages has the word epignosis. Matthew 14:35: "And when the men of that place had knowledge of him"—that is, of Jesus Christ—"the men of that place had knowledge of him, and had epignosis of him, had fuller knowledge of him, more precise and accurate knowledge of him. They sent out into all that country round about, and brought unto him all that were diseased, and besought him that they might only touch the hem of his garment, and as many as touched were made perfectly whole." So when they understood that Jesus Christ was the Son of God, the Great Physician, the Healer, the One who could do miracles, what did they do? They sent out and brought in the sick that he might heal them. In other words, they had fuller knowledge. They knew who Jesus Christ was.

Look in your Bibles to the book of Acts chapter 24. Here the Apostle is standing and defending himself. Ananias the high priest with the elders and Tertullus, a certain orator, came and tried to get Paul condemned and convicted. So, if you look in verse 7—in fact, let's go back to verse 5. Here's what Tertullus is saying before Felix, okay?

He says, "For we have found this man a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout all the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes, who also hath gone about to profane the temple, whom we took and would have judged according to our law"—that is we would have killed him. "But the chief captain Lysias came upon us, and with great violence took him away out of our hands, commanding his accusers to come unto thee: by examining of whom thyself may take epignosis, full knowledge of all these things whereof we accuse him. And the Jews also assented, saying that these things are so." Tertullus is saying: You have our testimony, but you also have the records that the chief captain Lysias has sent unto you. You have the full facts, a fuller and more precise knowledge of all the events that have transpired. So now you can make this judgment.

Now turn to Romans chapter 3, verse 20. Here's another time that the word epignosis is used: "Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin." Stop and think about that. "By the law is the knowledge of sin." If you were to go out on the street or into any church and ask any Christian what is sin, most would tell you something like this: "Well, it's something that's bad. It's something you shouldn't do." Some would say it's wicked, it's wrong, everybody knows that. But if you want a full knowledge of sin, you have to examine the law of God. The Bible says in 1 John 3:4, "Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law."

Biblical Examples of Epignosis

You can have an idea of sin in general, but to know the penalty, power, and presence of sin—anything about sin—you need to study the Law of God. God's Law reveals sin and all its wickedness and ungodliness. The word epignosis refers to a fuller, more precise, and more accurate knowledge. I want to show you what the author of Hebrews meant by, "Therefore leaving the first principles"—the point of beginning—"let us go on unto perfection." Look at Ephesians 1, beginning at verse 15. Every time you see the word knowledge in these passages, it is epignosis, a full or more precise and accurate knowledge. Paul prays, "Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and love unto all saints, cease not to

give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers." Here is what Paul prays for concerning these Ephesian Christians: "That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge"—or in the more precise and accurate knowledge—"of him." Now watch: "The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all." Paul is not praying about just your regular ABCs or two plus two. He says, "I'm praying that God will give you the full knowledge of himself." Watch verse 18: "That the eyes of your understanding will be enlightened, that you may know what is the hope of his calling."

What is the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power. Have you ever stopped to think of the almighty power that God exerted upon Jesus Christ when he raised him from the dead? Paul says that is the exact power God used in convicting and converting us—a supernatural power. Have you ever considered that Jesus Christ has been raised above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but in that which is to come? He is saying that Jesus Christ is all and in all. So this prayer in Ephesians 1 is far more than elementary knowledge; he wants you to go deeper into the purpose and will of God in salvation.

Look at Ephesians 4, verse 11: "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: that we

henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love."

He said, "I want you to come into the full knowledge, a more precise and accurate knowledge of the Son of God. I want you to become a mature man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. I don't want you to be children tossed to and fro, but I want you to speak the truth in love and grow up into him in all things." This is a little past your ABCs, a little past elementary rudimentary knowledge in the Bible.

Turn to Philippians chapter 1, beginning with verse 9. "And this I pray, that your love may abound more and more in full knowledge and in all judgment." Why do we need a fuller, more precise knowledge? "That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ; being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God." Once you begin to have a little more precise, accurate, and fuller knowledge, you will approve things that are excellent, be sincere, be without offence, and be filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ unto the glory and praise of God.

Now look at Colossians 1, beginning with verse 9. "For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the full, accurate, precise knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness; giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet"—or suitable—"to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light." Epignosis is something far, far

above elementary knowledge. It is a deeper, fuller, more precise knowledge.

Turn to 2 Peter chapter 1, beginning in verse 1. "Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ: Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the full, more precise, accurate knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, according as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the full knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust." This is to be given to us through a fuller, more accurate knowledge.

Now watch carefully. Beginning in verse 5: "And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue." Faith, elementary knowledge, gnosis is the starting point. You don't stop at the starting point. You're saved. Add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. Look what he says: "For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the full knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins." So what he is saying is this: it is the fuller, more precise knowledge that is going to enable you to add all of these things to your life, and to make you fruitful in every area.

Look in 2 Peter chapter 3 and verse 18. Peter ends his epistle by saying, "But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen." The word knowledge there is gnosis, that is for sure. But look what he says: "But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." I want to call your attention to the little word "and," A-N-D. That little word "and" is kai, K-A-I in the Greek. That same word is translated in our Bibles as "even" hundreds of times. So you could read verse 18 like this: "But grow in grace, even in the knowledge of

our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." Which would mean if you're not growing in knowledge, you're not growing in grace. Grace and peace, according to 2 Peter 1, comes to us through a fuller, more accurate knowledge of our great God and Saviour.

Application: Growing in Grace and Knowledge

When you are mature, you cannot be content to say your ABCs. You cannot be content with childish things. My oldest granddaughter used to watch Barney when she was a little girl. I hate Barney. I always hated Barney. But she watched it and so did all the grandchildren. And when she got older, every time going home, I would pass the Barneyville Road, I would call her and I would say, "I'm approaching the Barneyville Road."

Would you like me to pick you up? Let's go see Barney." "Papa, don't even mention that to me. I hate Barney." Why did she hate Barney? She used to love Barney. The answer is she matured; she outgrew all of that and put away childish things. As Christians, we are required to mature and grow. We cannot be content with just saying, "Well, I believe this, and I believe that." That's what everybody knows and understands. Have you gone any further? Have you given more thought to becoming more involved in learning a more precise, accurate, and fuller truth concerning the doctrines of God and the Lord Jesus Christ? Gnosis is our stepping stone, our starting point. Everybody has gnosis, some knowledge. We cannot continue to glory in elementary truths, in saying our times tables, or in reading "Run, Jane, run. Look, Dick, look at baby Sally." That's elementary stuff. Most Christians can't even tell you the books of the Bible or divide the Bible. When you were a little kid, you learned two plus two equals four, then multiplication and division. All that math, though important, was elementary; it only prepared you for algebra, calculus, and trigonometry. You couldn't do those things unless you knew the elementary. It's the same here: our elementary faith just prepares us to go on to a fuller, more precise, and more accurate faith when we really begin to look at what God is teaching us in Scripture. Our theology should change as we study, as we are enlightened by the Holy Spirit, as he gives us discernment. We do not change for profit, pleasure, poverty, pressure, or persecution; we change only as God is pleased to show us truth. Show me a man who

does not change his theology, and I will show you a man who does not read and study his Bible. That does not mean we change every day, but it does mean that as God shows us truth, we have to embrace truth. The one who does not change is dead.

Gnosis is our starting point. What you know right now is where you start. Then you begin to study and pray, and God opens your eyes to a fuller, more accurate, more precise knowledge of himself, his truth, and its application to everyday life. We want a full knowledge. Our theology of change is that we change as God shows us his truth, and we embrace, believe, and apply it.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to thee this day. We thank you for your word and truth. We ask that you grant us understanding, enlighten our minds, teach us, build us up in the most holy faith, help us mature and come to the full measure of the stature of Jesus Christ. May we not be children tossed to and fro, but understand more fully your love, grace, mercy, purpose, person, power, and position. In Jesus' name, amen.

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