

Changed Doctrine Equals a Changed Church

Dub McClish

The church can remain pure only as long as the doctrine it hears remains true. The New Testament contains numerous warnings about false sound doctrine and its purveyors, the following being typical:

If any man teacheth a different doctrine, and consenteth not to sound words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; he is puffed up, knowing nothing, but doting about questionings and disputes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, wranglings of men corrupted in mind and bereft of the truth, supposing that godliness is a way of gain (1 Tim. 6:3–5).

Those who are shamelessly ignoring such warnings appeal to various factors as bases for their agenda:

Culture

According to them, many things found in the New Testament (which practically all of us have always understood to be obligatory constants) were only rooted in the “culture” in which the first century saints lived.

Tradition

As with their “culture” assertion, they aver that many things in our practice always deemed obligatory are merely the product of human “tradition” (things long-practiced).

Growth

They say that we must radically change to produce numerical growth, which means doing things that appeal to the flesh more than to the spirit of man.

Community Image/Popularity

They cry that we must “keep up with the times,” meaning we must imitate and learn to get along with the denominations.

If the change-pushers were advocating changes in non-obligatory matters (e.g., what time to meet, whether to build or rent a place to assemble, et al.), then we could agree that such changes are allowable (albeit, not always expedient or productive). Their change lust runs far beyond merely optional practices.

Mark it down: These folk are tampering with obligatory elements of the Gospel. They are masters at combining and confusing optional and obligatory elements in a classic demonstration of “mixing apples and oranges,” knowing that Biblically ignorant saints in the pews cannot discern.

Obligatory Doctrines Now Being Redefined as Optional

Following are a few obligatory doctrines and practices that many are now redefining as optional:

The Plan of Salvation

Salvation from sin through the blood of Christ is fundamental, yet some are grievously tampering with God’s saving plan. Several are pushing “grace only/faith only,” introduced by Calvin and Luther in the sixteenth century. K.C. Moser began urging this heretical doctrine upon the church in the 1930s. Many have since publicly taught that salvation is by “grace, period.” In the early 1960s some began accusing Gospel preachers of emphasizing “the plan” over “the Man [Christ].”

Others a few years ago began ridiculing as “five-steppers” those who tell alien sinners to hear, believe, repent, confess their faith, and be baptized for remission of sins. Predictable results of such doctrinal corruption are evident on the Quail Springs “Church of Christ” (OK City, OK) Website (quailchurch.com/): **forty-five percent** of its members believe one can be saved by asking God to “come into his heart.”

Worship

A growing number are asserting that instrumental music in worship is optional. In the same Quail Springs poll, only **two percent** of its members believed the use of instruments in worship was a sin. More and more of them have jumped on the bandwagon of special “presentation music” (i.e., “praise teams,” solos, choirs, etc.) in our worship assemblies, which is no more authorized than instruments themselves. Other worship innovations borrowed from the denominations (e.g., responsive readings, “children’s church,” applause [during sermons and announcements, at baptisms], lifting up hands, serving the Lord’s supper on various days of the week, singing during the Lord’s supper, et al.) are all the rage in some congregations.

Women’s Leadership Roles

An increasing number are working to thrust women into church leadership roles not authorized by God’s Word, such as using women at the Lord’s table, in “praise teams,” as

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teachers of mixed adult classes, and as deaconesses. One congregation plans to appoint them as elders (“eldresses”?). The West Islip, NY, congregation already has a female pulpiteer.

Hermeneutics

Some press for change in our principles of Biblical interpretation (i.e., a “new hermeneutic”). They scorn the Scriptural, logical, and time-tested principles of direct statement, implication, the law of inclusion and exclusion, and respecting the silence of Scripture as flawed and out-moded. Besides, the “old hermeneutic” principles make us appear self-righteous, judgmental, and legalistic. They urge upon us their own homemade hermeneutic that will allow them to corrupt the church and to extend fellowship to the sects and their errors.

Fellowship

Several are seeking to redefine *fellowship*. They say we have been too narrow. The worshipers of the change gods tell us that as long as someone believes in the atonement Christ made and His Deity we should call him our brother. ACU professor Carroll Osburn pontificates that there should be “room in the...fellowship” for premillennialists, those who believe baptism is “because of” remission of sins, those who use instrumental music in worship, those who observe the Lord’s supper other than every Lord’s day, as long as they “believe that Christ is

The Nature of the Church

Many conceive of the church as a denomination, no longer believing in the ideal of genuine Christianity. “We need a twenty-first-century church, not a first-century church,” is their theme. They openly deny that there is a pattern for the church. Rubel Shelly and Randy Harris (ACU) wrote a book advocating that the only pattern for the church is the personal life of Christ, and that Acts through Revelation give us only a flawed picture of the church. Some congregations have already changed so much that they are unrecognizable as churches of Christ. They are dishonest to display a sign on their property with “Church of Christ” on it.

Why have so many congregations changed in their practice, purpose, and nature? The answer is that they have accepted corrupted doctrine. The seed of the kingdom, the church, is still the Word (Luke 8:10-11) and seeds bring forth only “after their own kind” (Gen. 1:11-12; cf. Gal. 6:7). Corn does not grow from watermelon seed, nor the church of Christ from a corrupted “gospel.” The practice of the church results from the doctrine it is fed. **Maintain the true message and you maintain the pure practice; corrupt the message and you corrupt the practice.** The Lord God has only one plant (the church of Christ) and it proceeds from only one
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seed (the Gospel of Christ). “Every plant which my heavenly Father planted not, shall be rooted up” (Mat. 15:13b).

The Gospel is God’s plan for man’s salvation from sin and its consequence of eternal condemnation (Rom. 1:16). The prophets yearned to see this salvation, and the angels were curious about it (1 Pet. 1:10–12). The inspired writers styled it the “Gospel of God” eight times. Since the Father is immutable, then so must be His Gospel. There could have been no Gospel (no good news of salvation) without Christ’s atoning death on the cross. Ten times the inspired writers referred to the Gospel in reference to the Christ. Since the Son of God is immutable, then so must be His Gospel. Since the Holy Spirit is immutable, then so must be the Gospel He has revealed and confirmed. The immutability of the Godhead is the very foundation of the immutability of the Gospel.

Noble Motivations for Maintaining the Sound Doctrine of the Gospel

It Is Blood Bought

Jesus described the blood He shed on Calvary as “my blood of the new testament” (Mat. 26:28, KJV). Had He not died there would have been no Gospel. If cost is any indication of worth, then the Gospel, without any alteration, is of greater worth than any human being can imagine. The fact that Jesus bought the Gospel (as well as the church [Acts 20:28]) with His perfect blood should serve as a powerful warning that we dare not change it in any way.

It Is the Power of God to Save

Romans 1:16 boldly declares the saving power of the Gospel. The Gospel as given by God, and nothing besides the Gospel, is God’s power to save because it reveals to us God’s plan for our salvation through Christ’s sacrifice. When men pervert it they make it into something different from the Gospel (Gal. 1:6–7). Any message that purports to be the Gospel, but which differs from the Gospel, cannot be the Gospel. **Only one Gospel has the power to save.**

The Curse of God Is Upon All Who Change It

Paul called down the anathema of God upon **any** messengers (heavenly or human) who preached a perverted “gospel” (Gal. 1:8–9). He expressed amazement that they had so quickly accepted the polluted message (v. 6). God has not the least patience with those who rearrange His immutable Word to suit themselves.

I shudder to think of the fate of millions who preach a perverted “gospel,” including those who have departed from our own ranks because they were not content with the Gospel.

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These have streamlined the doctrine of Christ to make it more palatable, to gain acceptance in denominational circles, to keep their jobs, to appear more erudite, or for some other reason. The multiplied millions of those who are following the Gospel-changers, whether in or out of the church, are following them to their own destruction (Mat. 15:14; Gal. 1:7; 5:4).

When I was young (many years ago), preachers who were true to the Gospel were almost universally honored, esteemed, supported, and used. Those who were on the liberal fringe were not tolerated, whether in print, in the pulpit, or on our college campuses, but were kept on the fringe. Human nature has changed little over the centuries. Paul had to deal with rejection from brethren in Galatia and Corinth, not because he preached error, but because he preached the Truth. So must we do now.

Conclusion

Solomon said: "My son, fear thou Jehovah and the king; And company not with them that are given to change" (Pro. 24:21). Those who urge change in our teaching and practice are those who decry the very concept of fearing Jehovah. However, those who revere the Almighty would not dare either to augment or diminish the Gospel by one iota.

Solomon warned: "Company not with them that are given to change." On the one hand we, like Paul, are determined to shrink not from "declaring the whole counsel of God" and are "set for the defence of the gospel" (Acts 20:27; Phi. 1:16). On the other hand, many have ceased to "give the more earnest heed to the things that were heard [the Gospel]" causing them to "drift away from them" (Heb. 2:1).

While some of us remain firmly rooted in the apostles' doctrine, others have cut themselves loose from its restrictions. Thinking themselves now "free," they have foolishly become the slaves of error. The eventual extent of their apostasy is anyone's guess, but many of them have adopted seed principles sufficiently corrupt to lead them into Universalism. It is not a question of **whether** we must cease to have any company with them, but only of **when**. Some are so far gone that fellowshiping them would constitute fellowshiping the denominations, which they have already embraced. The cause of it all is their determination to change the unchangeable Gospel, and thus the church.

The Gospel is the incorruptible seed, "the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever" (1 Pet. 1:23, KJV). God allows men free will to alter, add to, take from, mutilate, explain away, make merchandise of, or abuse it in a thousand ways. However, when they finish, the Gospel will still be stubbornly standing there as God's perfect will and standard at the
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Judgment (John 12:48). The way it reads now is precisely the way it will read on the Last Great Day. Men do not really change the Gospel; it stands as God gave it – utterly immutable. When men begin to tamper with the doctrine of Christ, it becomes merely another false, damning religious message. Without sound doctrine there can be no sound church.

[Note: I wrote this MS, and it originally appeared as an “Editorial Perspective” in the June 2003 issue of *The Gospel Journal*, a 36-page monthly of which I was editor at the time.]

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