

As the great apostle Paul stood at the brink of death and penned his final letter, he admonished Timothy, his fellow evangelist and co-laborer in the gospel, to be faithful to the ministry, knowing that in his absence some would turn away from the faith, "...For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned into fables. ..." (2 Timothy 4:1-8). This they did! And to this day, God's servants are called upon to refute these fables. The fable we are to deal with in this lesson is, "If the Church Is to Survive, We Have to Change".

A Cry For Change

"Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein" (Jeremiah 6:16). Throughout the Ages man has cried for change. Cain tried to change the worship of God but was rebuked and rejected for having done so, "And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord. And Abel, he also brought of the firstling of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering: But unto Cain and his offering he had not respect. ..." (Genesis 4:3-5). Paul wrote of those who sought to change the gospel of Christ, "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ" (Galatians 1:6-7). Vine defines pervert, "metas-trepho (3344), to transform into something of an opposite character"(meta, signifying 'a change', and strepho,) as the Judaizers sought to 'pervert the gospel of Christ', Gal. 1:7; ..." (pages 469 and 470). Thus, we find that the Bible has always had its critics, who have sought to change

its message: in the Patriarchal Age, in the Mosaic Age, and in the Christian (present) Age. As man began to wander further and further away from God, he has tried to modernize and update God and His Word, instead of asking for and returning to the old paths (Jeremiah 6:16). But, God's will and counsel has and will continue to stand the test of time, "Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure:" (Isaiah 46:9-10).

Some Unchangeable Things

God does not change. His nature and attributes have been, are, and will continue to be the same as they have been from the beginning. God said through the great prophet Malachi, "For I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed" (Malachi 3:6). The Hebrew writer penned, "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and forever" (Hebrews 13:8). And, "wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us:" (Hebrews 6:17-18). Of these two verses Vine writes, "immutable, immutability, ametathetos, (276), an adjective signifying "immutable" (a, negative, metatithemi, "to change"), Heb 6:18, where the "two immutable things" are the promise and the oath. In v.17 the word is used in the neuter with the article, as a noun, denoting "the immutability", with reference to God's counsel. Examples from the papyri show that the word was used as a technical term in connection with wills, "the connotation adds considerably to the force of Heb. 6:17 (and foll.)" (Moulton and Milligan, page 320). God's counsel and/or will for man will never change.

God's Word will not change either. In speaking to the Jews of His own day and age, Jesus said of the law, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot of one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled" (Matthew 5:17-18). His life and death were a fulfillment of the law and its teachings, not a contradiction or annulment of it. He has given the same promise of His law for us today, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words shall not pass away" (Matthew 24:35). And, "...The grass withered and flower thereof falleth away: But the word of the Lord endureth forever..." (1 Peter 1:24-25). And once more, "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day" (John 12:48). God's Word is not going to change. It will read the same in the day of judgment as it does today. And, as it did when first penned about two-thousand years ago.

The Unchangeable Church

The church was in the counsel of God from eternity, "And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord:" (Ephesians 3:9-11). Since the church was/is a part of His eternal will and since His word and will can't be changed, why would anyone think they could/can change the laws (God's Word) governing His church? Yet, in order to appeal to men, this is what some have and are trying to do. Paul warned, "... For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ ..." (Galatians 1:6-12).

One of the current movements seeking to change the church is known as the Emerging Church Movement. One writer referred to it as "... A movement chasing a culture." Tolerance seems to be its fundamental doctrine. Instead of believing in absolute truth, many of her critics conclude that the movement embraces relativism. Webster defines relativism, "rel-a-ti-viz-um, n. Philos. the doctrine that knowledge or truth is relative and dependent upon time, place, and individual experience" (page 809). This movement embraces the humanistic views of communal living, social justice, environmental causes, with emphasis being put on the here and now. In worship, they believe in the mid-east meditation for prayer (mysticism), celebrated worship, and narrative (story telling and testimonials) instead of expository teaching.

The church is the pillar and ground of the truth, God's unchangeable word, "But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how those oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God; the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:15). As such, it is her duty to uphold these ageless truths in light of the cry for change. So, what does God's Word and His Church have to say about the above? The church believes in tolerance but will not tolerate sin. Especially those like homosexuality which are clearly condemned by the scripture (Romans 1:26-27). Truth can be known, must be obeyed, and is not subject to change with the culture (John 8:32 and 1 Peter 1:24-25). Life is about the hereafter and while the church espouses stewardship, it also understands that the earth was designed to accommodate man, not man the earth (John 6:27 and Genesis 1:28). Worship is to be offered from the heart, yet at the same time in accordance to God's Word (John 4:24 and John 17:17). And, the preaching of the word is designed to change the life of man, not changed to fit the lifestyle of man (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Conclusion

The Church is to uphold the Word of God (1 Timothy 3:15). It is man who needs to change (repent), not the church, "Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, saith the Lord God. Repent and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin. Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye" (Ezekiel 18:30-32).

Works Cited

1. All scripture references are from the KJV of the Bible, unless noted.
2. Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words, W. E. Vine - Merrill F. Unger - William White Jr., Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville - Camdenton - New York, An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, (pages 469, 470).
3. Ibid, Vine ... (page 320).
4. The Living Webster Encyclopedic Dictionary of the English Language, Noah Webster, The English Language Institute of America Inc., Chicago, Illinois, 1973, (page 809).

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**"They Shall Be Turned
Unto Fables"**

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