

Church Through Change

Our fathers kept the Faith, will we also keep it?

Following are a few thoughts which have come to me about God's Church. I often find myself looking back at history, wondering how we arrived at the place we are. This leads me on rabbit trails of thoughts which may not always have clear outcomes or correct deductions. However, maybe there are nuggets of truth that reveal themselves in the chase which otherwise we would not have thought of. One should not look back at history with criticism, but rather that by studying history, it may help shed light on our current world.

Someone recently told me, "But our fathers kept the faith." That statement, coupled with a few other thoughts, was the beginning of this writing. I simply submit these as thoughts for consideration.

I have not scrutinized history, nor am I wise enough to know in all the ways the changing world affected the Church of God. However, we know that God's Church is not stuck in a moment of time, but will withstand the test of time, until eternity. My intention is not to say that one era is right and another wrong. There always have been and always will be dangers for the Christian. The Church of God will always be challenged and sought to be destroyed by Satan. He hates anything that speaks of God, and if we are one of those who love God, well, then, we are also a target of his wrath.

As we look back, we view the Church of God, as a rock, unchanged by time and eternity; something we can depend on, a shelter of refuge from the storms of life. Her doctrine was founded in the Word of God, and Her members lived and practiced what they believed; they were unwilling to compromise their faith. They taught their children the skills and principles of life and godliness.

To be a Christian in those days, meant a separate life, and at times ridicule from their non-Christian friends and neighbors. This further solidified their core beliefs. They stood firm on the grounds which they believed in, undeterred by change and ridicule. They were not distracted by easy communication, social media, or social activities. They operated a simple life, with basic principles, and loved the truth.

The Church of God today remains unchanged in foundational doctrine and love. She stands upon truth. However, to view Her only as a rock, timeless and unchanged, leaves us with the feeling of something of the past. If that is all it is to us, then it is no different than any other piece of history. The truth is, She is a living, breathing entity, connected with God Himself who gives her life, as His Bride. She is not locked back in a moment of time but is ever changing to meet the needs of each generation.

Our fathers come from the great generation of industrialization and modernization. Some, perhaps the very elderly, saw the world change with the invention of cars, planes, electricity, and radio. They grew up in an era of working for what they got. The great depression, the world wars, and the development of world economy. Solid values, strong work and moral ethics were the norm, and anything other than that was considered unacceptable. These powerful guiding values provided them with stability and backbone to maintain a charted course, largely undeterred by outside influence. However, that same industrial revolution forced them to open their minds to change. This no doubt began to fracture the methodical way of life. Many of them liked and appreciated change and modernization. Travel went from a day's trip or longer to town for necessities, to going to traveling there in minutes and multiple times per day. What used to be a grueling journey of months, a year, now is possible within a matter of hours.

This age of people leaned heavily on working for what they got, with minor regard for how they or others felt. There were also many first-generation Christians, some coming from other backgrounds of methodical religious practices. For them, the law-oriented approach to Christian life served them well; it was how they understood life. The law of sowing and reaping was the general attitude of the day. Feelings had less sway in the way they did life than the facts of existence. They did not have options, so they did what was at hand to do. Life was hard, death was eminent, which caused them to seem less sensitive to their own feelings. In many cases justice for wrong was up to whoever would meet it out in those days. This was the norm for generations.

Then life began to change. People were no longer stuck in just doing what their fathers taught them to do. Modernization brought more money, more jobs, and more options. Men were able to travel and choose occupations. They became more self-reliant, and protective of what they chose to do. If they did not like what they were doing, they could then change occupations or jobs without much effort. There also became less personal justice on wrongdoing, and in the court system, the argument shifted from moral truth to the protection of people's rights. This gradual change of landscape allowed people to become more connected with their feelings, and consequently their personal rights and freedom. Over time strong judgment on people's choices and ways of life became offensive. In the meantime, people drifted away from the guiding moral compass founded on godly principles and began to be more concerned about personal rights and liberty. Truth has become fluid; in many cases, with no other basis than one's opinion.

Under the old guard, there was a tendency to cover up those things which would be a shame to society. At times, this allowed for the covering of moral sins; socially unacceptable things were squashed and covered. This caused a lot of sorrow and heartache for the affected individuals. They were bound by moral codes and shame to hide their sorrow. To reveal the truth had consequences of not being believed and more shamed, or being shamed for speaking out on topics that were taboo and not to be discussed.

As a pendulum swings to and fro, so is the swing between law and personal liberty. The strength of shame is fear, where there is little shame there is little fear. In modern society there is little shame, hence there is little fear. In the day we live, man is losing his moral compass. Some of the changes which have taken place over the years are not all bad. However, without a moral compass, there is no means to keep man from moral degradation.

It seems like in the past, Christians were more connected with the thought of the fear of judgment, than of a loving relationship with Christ their Redeemer. Perhaps they were more performance orientated. Conversely, today in a general sense the focus has changed from a performance-oriented life to a life of acceptance of all things, claiming the love of Jesus as paramount, and judgment of sin as secondary. This way undermines biblical principles, by removing the judgment on sin; replacing it with the belief that God's love covers a multitude of sins. In this way many churches have broadened the way to accept all manner of sins which are not in accordance with God's word. A flavor of this wants to creep into the Church of God as well.

The leaning towards personal rights and liberty tend to push away the judgment of God on sin. When this laxity is in a Christian's life, it becomes apparent on the outside. The lack of judgment on sin causes weak and casual Christian lives. The results are spiritually weak homes, lax child training, and a tendency of a gospel focused on social acceptance, rather than on the fear of God. This bears fruit in self-interest; lack of interest in church attendance and church-related activities.

Today God is leading His Church to meet the need of the time. It seems she is taking more the role of a loving mother than a disciplinarian father. The focus is more on fostering a personal relationship with Jesus and the leading of the Holy Spirit; bringing about a change of heart, which in turn should bring about a change to the walk of life. This shift of focus is not free from danger. Whereas before, one may have been tempted to put on an outward show of looking right yet hiding sin; today the danger is to say that God is okay with my shallow Christian life and calling my sins my weaknesses instead of sin. A subtle thought is, "I am fine the way I am and you have no right to judge me." This promotes a diluted form of the gospel, eventually rendering the power of the Gospel useless. Man may slip into sin almost without realizing it, thinking he is okay.

We live in a dangerous time. However, God designed His Church to be adaptable to the day we live. She is a living breathing organization governed by the Holy Spirit. Her code of moral truth founded in the scripture, is no different today than it was back in the days of our fathers and grandfathers. The truth of the scripture must be applied with the love of God and the gentleness of the Holy Spirit. We must teach that sin indeed has a price, judgment will come by and by, and we must be ready. The Church of God is not an old, bygone reality, but a living breathing entity, with God at its head. She is to be respected and honored as the bride of Christ.

In bygone years, Church decisions, and respect to Her authority in a Christian's life, were almost regarded the same as Bible doctrine. Today there is a trend that challenges those long held principles. In the casual day we live, Satan promotes the thought that it is not as important to blend in with the people of God, as having a personal relationship with Jesus. Dress, appearance, and possessions, seem to slip just enough to challenge those long held principles of simplicity, modesty, and economy, yet still claiming peace with God and a relationship with Jesus.

While it is true that salvation does not hinge on practice, the lack of it speaks of something else. Satan knows he cannot directly challenge doctrine, so he targets practice, which is not able to be directly defended by scripture. To reveal these subtle spirits, we must look at what motivates this casual life, and what spirit is justifying the actions.

God is a reasonable God; not expecting us to look like cookie cutter Christians. However, the Word of God is clear that by the fruits of the tree, you know of what sort it is.

The Church of God is not a heavenly entity, separate from its members, like a benchmark of perfection to strive for. This would be contrary to the view we find of Her in the Bible. When the apostles wrote letters to the New Testament Churches, they were encouraging the members in the Churches to love one another, and stand strong in the faith, and the unity of the Holy Spirit. The members made up the living breathing Church of the day, standing fast in the apostle's doctrine and the Word of God, with their lives governed by the Holy Spirit.

If we are keen to the Holy Spirit, he will guide us, and warn us of spirits of resistance in our hearts; the same as He did in the time of the Church Fathers. When a man loves God, grace will be given him by God to submit to the Body of Christ, His Bride.

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