

May 12, 2003

Dear Brethren, Co-Workers and Friends,

What has changed?

Shortly after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, there was a spontaneous reaction among many people around the world that things had dramatically changed and that nothing would ever be the same again. And to a large degree, the world we now live in is different.

That difference is most notable in the realignment of national interests. Today, we find old alliances such as NATO now being challenged and crumbling into fragmented groups. The United Nations is suffering from its own inability to effectively influence international events or to actually resolve serious conflicts.

Coalitions led by the United States and Britain have now fought two wars in an effort to deal with the threat of terrorism. For those most intimately affected by these actions, great change has swept through their lives.

In fact, it seems that each day's news brings reports of events that threaten to change all of our lives in one way or another. Diseases without cures, disastrous and deadly storms, economic instability, unspeakable violence—all this and more only serve to keep everyone in an unsettled state of anxiety and fearfulness.

How about each one of us? What has changed in our lives? Have we allowed ourselves to become so engulfed in the events of the moment that we, too, have begun to focus on the things of this age—this fading world?

Jesus Christ left an outline for His followers so that we could understand and prepare for these times. As He introduced end time events that would quickly unfold leading to His return to the earth, He interjected this statement: “All these are *the beginning of sorrows*” (Matthew 24:8). Those who will live through these tumultuous times will witness and experience great change! Later on in this same chapter, Jesus says of the world that it will not understand the times, and that people will live their lives OBLIVIOUS to the true meaning or staggering consequences (verses 37-39).

However, we are instructed to watch and to be prepared. In Hebrews 10: 24-25, we find this warning: “Let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, *and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.*”

Not only are we commanded to nurture and strengthen one another in the Church of God, but we are also to be witnesses of the true hope and the certain future that resides with God. Note the commission given to all Christians at all times by Jesus Christ: “You are the *light of the world*. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:14-16).

When God first called us into His truth, we had to begin to change. We were called upon to place *God first* in our lives. Everything else had to take second place—so to speak. That meant that we had to walk differently than the world, and, in many cases, to give up jobs, friendships and even family relationships.

We can be reminded of the need to change by the carnal actions of two of Christ's disciples—*prior* to their conversion. After a Samaritan village refused to receive Christ and His disciples, we find this exchange: “And when His disciples James and John [the “sons of thunder”] saw this, they said, ‘Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?’ But He turned and rebuked them, and said, ‘You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them’” (Luke 9:54-56).

These same two, however, did change. James gave *his own life* for the truth at the hand of king Herod (Acts 12:1-2). John went on to write under inspiration from God some of the most profoundly deep insights into the life of Christ. His loving attitude for others is beautifully reflected in his three letters, to be found in the “General Epistles.” Both James and John changed! They grew in Christian maturity to become more and more like God the Father and Jesus Christ (compare 1 John 4:7-12, 16).

The reason they changed is the same reason we may all change. The Holy Spirit of God was given to them (1 John 4:13). All who are called, who repent, believe and who are baptized for the remission of sins are promised the incomparable gift of God's Holy Spirit by which we can *change*. But our change doesn't stop when we receive God's Holy Spirit!

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, brings to light this model for our ongoing change: "Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with *the same mind*, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles (the world)—when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries. In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you" (1 Peter 4:1-4).

Paul, another apostle, also succinctly states the way for a Christian to change: "*Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus*" (Philippians 2:5).

What has changed?

Hopefully, brethren, *our lives have changed!* We have continued to *grow* and to *mature* as Christians. 2 Peter 3:18 states: "...*but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*" In speaking about the purpose for the Church of God and the way in which Jesus Christ organized it, Paul explains our process of change and growth with this goal: "...till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the *knowledge of the Son of God*, to a *perfect man*, to the *measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ*; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may *grow up* in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together *by what every joint supplies*, according to the effective working by which *every part does its share*, causes growth of the body for the edifying of *itself in love*" (Ephesians 4:13-16).

Brethren, as we approach the Feast of Pentecost, it is important to reflect on our calling—where we have been, and *where we are going!* This is something we *must finish!* The way for us to endure all the way to the end is for us to continue to change—to change to become more and more like our Father and our Savior, Jesus Christ. In doing this, we will fulfill what Christ instructed us to do: "...therefore you shall be [become] perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48).

Grasping the tremendous meaning of this verse just cited is something unique to the Church of God, because its true understanding is only revealed through God's Holy Spirit. This awesome truth includes the revelation of another mystery hidden from this world—WHY we are to become perfect as God the Father is perfect. The answer has everything to do with who and what God IS—and WHY man was created in the first place. We are nearing the completion of our latest booklet entitled—*God Is A Family*. You will find this to be an absolutely comprehensive presentation that thoroughly proves from the pages of the Bible that God is a Family and that the God Family has always existed—and that it will always exist. The booklet also goes on to show the awesome future which mankind has been offered—to become the very sons and daughters of God and to be born into the Family of God! This is the ultimate reason for our change—we are to give up in this life worldly ways and thoughts and develop instead the character and mind of God (compare 1 John 2:15-17), so that Jesus Christ can in the end "*change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body*" (Philippians 3:21, *Authorized Version*).

Once again, brethren, we wish to thank you for your prayerful support of the mutual work God has given to us. The new *STANDINGWATCH* webcast is nearing its inaugural program. Designed to recap timely events reflecting Biblical fulfillment, this represents yet one more opportunity for the Church of the Eternal God to let the light of truth and love for others shine forth. Please continue to pray specifically that God will guide the things we are doing in order that we may truly seek and fulfill His will.

Finally, as we all face our daily lives and the troubled world in which we now live, consider this counsel found in 1 Peter 4:7-8: "But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers, And *above all things have fervent love for one another*, for 'love will cover a multitude of sins.'"

In Christ's Service,



David J. Harris