

A Brief Theology of Change

To discuss the inevitability of *change* is moot. However, to understand and view *change* as constructive and useful in our spiritual transformation is an important insight. Scripture teaches that God's plan for us is the transformation of our character II Corinthians 3:18; Ephesians 4:11-16. The ultimate *change* for us as Christ-followers is the transition from our physical body to a spiritual one I Corinthians 15: 50-55.

The abruptness of *change* often brought about by crisis or by others making major decisions that directly affect us can create tension in our lives. Such tension can be unhealthy and even destructive unless we can see it within a spiritual context. There is no inherent character in *change*. It can result in good or bad. It is how we respond to *change* that determines its effect. Consider the story of Abram at age seventy-five being told by God to *change* not only where he would live, but how he would live Genesis 12:1-5. That is pretty significant *change*! The most fulfilling years of Abram's life were the result of his willingness to embrace the *change* God called him to.

It is when we seek spiritual understanding of what is occurring in our lives that we will allow the Holy Spirit to use *change* to continue His transformation process in us. Left to our own human devices of surviving and coping we will most often make decisions that result in stunted spiritual growth and even despair.

God causes some *change* and allows other circumstantial events in our lives to mold our Christian character. It is in *change* and difficulties that we are prompted to depend on God. Consider the young maiden Mary when she is told she will become the mother of the Messiah, even though she is not married Luke 1:26-38.

The *status quo* is usually not a fertile environment for us to spiritually grow in. Unfortunately, we do not mature well during prosperity. Our growth most often occurs in adversity or when God uproots us physically or spiritually for our own good. We may not be able to see it at the time, but that is the very nature of the faith He is seeking to deepen in us- trust. God will not force Himself on us, but He will provide new opportunities for us to depend on Him. That is their purpose. Sometimes those new opportunities are born out of tragic events. God may not have caused them, but He can certainly use them Romans 8:28; Psalm 90:15.

An ever present danger in resisting God's promptings is that we will become hard-hearted. Hard-heartedness results when we do not obey the Holy Spirit's direction for our lives Hebrews 3:7-8. A hard heart will not only spiritually paralyze us. It will quickly desensitize us to God's presence so we will act contrary to His will for us. And sadly, we may not even be aware of our state. For many people significant *change* threatens a spiritual comfort zone where the parameters have been painstakingly shaped. One writer expressed our need for *change* this way: God loves us as we are, but too much to leave us that way.

When we are facing circumstances that will result in major *change*, whether by our choosing or not, there are actions we can employ. These actions can help us see more clearly how such a *change* can be used to grow us. I want to mention two I believe can be of great benefit to us. First, when such a *change*

is before us, it is wisdom to do what Jesus did. He retreated and prayed! Luke 6: 12. This is the type of prayer that transcends the prayer of our normal devotional life. This praying is better situated for a place and time outside of our normal schedule when we are not as limited by routine. There we can be more sensitive to the Holy Spirit's promptings deep in our spirit and better glean helpful insights from Scripture. In such an environment we can begin to see God's hand in the *change* that is occurring and sense what He may be doing in our life Isaiah 43:18-19.

Second, I want to suggest a Quaker discipline that I have titled a *Council of Discernment*. When one is facing significant change in life, he/she asks a few wise friends to sit with them and listen as he/she explains the circumstances prompting the change and how he/she feels. The council members do not offer commentary but only ask clarifying questions. The purpose of these questions is to help their friend think through aspects of the *change* and hopefully see it in an amplified light. After an appropriate time when council members have asked their questions (not given commentary) they will each offer to their friend affirmation of his/her gifts as they see them and state what they sense God is doing in his/her life in this *change*. This practice can be helpful as one deals with traumatic *change*. *Change* seen as spiritual adventure, not endured circumstances provides energy and new faith experiences in one's life. (For a more detailed description of this practice, see the book, *Let Your Life Speak*, by Parker Palmer).

As stated earlier, *change* is inevitable. However, *change* that is not of our choosing or even *change* that we have chosen, but with uncertainty and fear can become great blessing for us. What is vital to know and act on is the truth that God's purpose is to continually mold and shape us into His likeness Philippians 2:5 and nothing that occurs in our lives is beyond His power to use.

Dennis Rogers

Collegiate Ministries

GA Baptist Convention