

Twelve Methods Used By Change Agents to Change the Church

Lesson Text: Ephesians 5:6-7 & Isaiah 5:20

INTRODUCTION:

- A. For the past several years it has been clear that some are not satisfied with the New Testament church.
1. There has been a concentrated effort to make changes in doctrine, practice, and worship and to make the church more acceptable to the world.
 2. Those who have spearheaded these efforts generally have been designated as “change agents” because change is their goal.
 3. As with politicians who are seeking to replace the established order, the theme of some in the church is, “It is time for a change!”
 4. Not all change agents are in agreement on all points, but there are those among them who want to change:
 - a. The role of women in worship.
 - b. Music in worship.
 - c. The style and emphasis of preaching.
 - d. The attitude toward the Bible as authority.
 - e. The place of baptism for the remission of sins.
 - f. The distinct nature of the church.
 - g. The work of the Holy Spirit.
- B. The rationale for these proposed changes is that we must have them in order to grow.
1. We are told that contemporary society and our own young people are:
 - a. Bored with the worship.
 - b. Bored with doctrine.
 - c. Bored with preaching.
 - d. Bored with the church.
 2. The so-called solution to this crisis is to discover the needs of the people we are trying to reach and then adjust our teaching and practice to accommodate those needs. Perhaps the most obvious changes relate to public worship and a new style of praise being set forth.
 3. These changes, which are making headway in many congregations, are not always open and obvious.
 - a. Sometimes they are subtle and gradual.
 - b. There are undoubtedly many fine people who are still identified with “change agent”

congregations, who do not recognize the changes that have transpired or the inexorable direction in which the church is heading.

- C. These change agents are making for difficult times in many places for the body of Christ.
1. The brotherhood is confronted by those who are endeavoring to change the Lord's church from what it is in the Bible to what men want it to be today.
 2. The purposed desire of these change agents is to redefine the church and fashion it into nothing more than a denomination among denominations.
 - a. They are repulsed by the established pattern for the New Testament Church.
 - b. They preach their sermons, write their books, pen their articles, conduct their Jubilees and sorted seminars, and pen their letters in order to accomplish their intended goal.
 3. Brethren in many places have been torn apart and divided asunder by their sustained efforts.
 - a. Individuals have been swayed.
 - b. Families have been divided.
 - c. Congregations have been divided.
 - d. Communities have been divided.
 - e. A brotherhood has been attacked.
 - f. Truth has been compromised and shunned.
 - g. Souls have been lost.
- D. One of the most familiar stories in the Bible relates to Israel's rejection of the government God had chosen for them. The story is recorded in 1 Samuel 8.
1. For some 300+ years God had placed judges over Israel, but the time came when they wanted to change, to replaced God's plan with their own .
1 Samuel 8:4-5 - “Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah, and said to him, Look, you are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now make us a king to judge us like all the nations.”
 2. Samuel was displeased with the change sought by the people. **1 Samuel 8:7** - God said to Samuel, “. . . They have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them.”
 3. God told Samuel to warn the people of the consequences of their actions and the difficulties that would arise under the reign of a king.
 4. The response of the people to Samuel's warning is recorded in **1 Samuel 8:19-20** - “Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, No, but we will have a king over us, that we also may be like all the nations, and that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles.”
 - a. They refused to heed the warnings given by Samuel because their desire was to be like other nations.
 - b. The wanted their way over God's way.

- c. Are these not Old Testament ‘change agents?’
- E. Even today, there are those who, in effect, are crying out, “Give us a king that we may be like the nations around us.”
1. It is sad but true that some do not want to be different in contending:
 - a. That baptism is essential to salvation.
 - b. That instrumental music in worship is unauthorized in the Scriptures.
 - c. That women are not to exercise dominion over men in the assembly.
 - d. That we are bound by the authority of the Scriptures. **Colossians 3:17** - “And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.”
 2. They want “to be like the nations around us.”
- F. There are three options faced by change agents .
1. The first option is that they could leave and go elsewhere to join an existing group or to establishing their own.
 2. The second option is that they could stay and work from within.
 - a. This might be styled the “termite option.”
 - b. In stead of leaving, as once was the case, most may choose to stay and work from within.
 - c. Unfortunately, this methodology has proved to be very successful.
 - d. Some have been able to change entire congregations.
 - e. Even when a congregation is not subverted and overcome, a substantial minority can be developed as:
 1. A source of friction and conflict within the congregation.
 2. Or as a nucleus of a new and different work. Example: Two services: one traditional and the other contemporary.
 3. The third option, which seems to be growing in popularity, is to separate and form what is usually styled “a community church.”
 - a. Such bodies have been described as “loosely affiliated with the church of Christ.”
 - b. The founders and members of these churches generally maintain ties with churches of Christ
but tend to conceal these connections from the community and from the target audience they are seeking to influence.
 - c. Because the community church movement is relatively new to churches of Christ, many brethren are not aware of what it involves.
 - d. While conducting a gospel meeting in Alabama, brethren made it a point to drive me out to see the location of the Community Church. They made it a point to tell me how it originated and the history of those who were involved.
 - e. In Tennessee, I was acquainted with one preacher who was fired after several years of committing adultery, who in turn remained in the area

by taking a number of his members with him out to a new location where he established a community church and served as its preacher.

- G. Since I have made mention of the community church movement, permit me to pause and make some additional observations on the subject before we begin to enumerate “Twelve Methods Used By Change Agents.”
1. The community church movement is not unique to churches of Christ. In fact, it has grown out of a denominational background.
 - a. The chief models of the community church movement are:
 1. The Willow Creek Community Church in Illinois.
 2. The Saddleback Community Church in California.
 - b. The textbook for the movement is The Purpose Driven Church by Rick Warren, “pastor” of the Saddleback Community Church.
 2. Some of the characteristics of community churches, as they have developed among churches of Christ, are:
 - a. Contemporary music and what might be called “upbeat worship.”
 - b. Eliminating or diminishing the name “church of Christ.”
 - c. Casual emphasis in worship, both in style and manner of dress.
 - d. Different kind of leadership model than “authoritarian” elders.
 - e. Praise teams and entertainment orientation in worship.
 - f. A greater emphasis on “self,” including one’s own feelings and emotions.
 - g. De-emphasis on doctrine and the restoration plea.
 - h. Less contact and fellowship with mainline churches of Christ.
 - i. Division of existing congregations in order to implement the “community” model.
 - j. A market-driven program. That is, striving to provide what people want or what they are seeking. Brethren, we need to be informed about these matters lest we find ourselves being drawn in.
 - I. The ultimate question facing congregations of the Lord’s church is whether we will retain our commitment to be patterned after the church revealed in the New Testament . . . or, . . . whether we will be transformed and molded by the standards of this world.
 - J. God’s Word is very specific.
 1. **Psalm 119:104** - “Through Your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way.”
 2. **Ephesians 5:6-7** - “Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers with them.”
 3. **Mark 13:22** - “For false christs and false prophets will rise and show signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.”
 4. **Ephesians 4:14** - “. . . 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.”

5. **2 Corinthians 11:3-4** - “But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.

For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted-- you may well put up with it!”

6. **1 Timothy 4:1-3** - “Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons,

speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron,

forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.”

7. **2 Timothy 4:1-4** - “I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom:

Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers;

and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.”

8. **Hebrews 13:9** - “Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines . . .”

9. **1 John 4:1** - “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.”

10. **Isaiah 5:20** – “Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; Who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! “

- K. Brethren, that we be set on our guard, permit me to sound forth these lessons of warning by revealing some twelve different methods used by change agents to distort, change, or replace the Lord’s New Testament church.

METHOD #1 - THEY BEGIN BY CHANGING THOSE THINGS THAT ARE MATTERS OF EXPEDIENCY.

- A. They are constantly changing the order of worship.

1. Surely it does not matter if:
 - a. We sing two songs or twenty-two.

- b. If we have one prayer, two prayers, or a multitude of prayers.
- c. Songs displayed on a projector screen or taken from a songbook.
- 2. Our worship should be conducted decently and in order. **1 Corinthians 14:40** - “Let all things be done decently and in order.”
- B. God has not commanded any certain order to be followed only that upon the first day of the week we;
 - 1. Sing
 - 2. Pray
 - 3. Teach
 - 4. Partake of the Lord’s Supper
 - 5. Give of our financial means
- C. Constantly changing the order of the worship service is all being done to get churches into the habit of change . . . constant change.
 - 1. Lynn Anderson says this is the first step in changing the church of Christ.
 - 2. Constant change is different from the occasional change.
- D. They will argue that we have been changing over the years.
 - 1. We now have padded pews, air-conditioning, nice buildings, etc. which are all different than we enjoyed years ago.
 - 2. They remind us of how good these changes have been.
 - a. Who would want to go back to kerosene lamps, wooden benches, potbellied stoves and the like?
 - b. They begin to make us think that all change is good.
 - 3. They lead congregations into believing that there is no difference in padded pews and the acts of worship. Brethren, there is a difference in how many songs you sing before the sermon and whether that singing is done by the congregation, a choir, a quartet, or some praise team.
- E. Changing matters of expediency and changing those things commanded are not the same.

METHOD #2 - THEY DENY THAT WE HAVE A PATTERN TO FOLLOW.

- A. They preach, teach, and write saying that we do what we do as a matter of our heritage or our tradition.
 - 1. Often in their writings and preaching they speak of what we do as coming from “our heritage.”
 - 2. They begin planting these seeds with the intention of producing a crop of members who believe that we do not use mechanical instruments in our worship because it is “our tradition” not to use it.
 - 3. They question the arguments that have been made to condemn mechanical instruments of music.
 - 4. They never even suggest that singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs is a matter of doctrine.

5. Friends, partaking of the Lord’s Supper upon the first day of every week, baptism for the remission of sins, and congregational singing are not matters of heritage . . . they are a matter of doctrine!
 - a. Everything we do must be authorized by Scripture. **Colossians 3:17** - “And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus . . .”
 1. That means by his authority.
 2. Do it all because He requires and commands it, and with a desire to honor Him.
 3. His authority should be the warrant and His glory the aim of all our actions and words.
- B. If there is Scripture for any practice then by all means let us get busy and do it, but if there is not Scripture then by all means let us forsake it.

METHOD #3 - THE WORK TO DIVIDE AND CONQUER.

- A. This began years ago with the divided assembly.
 1. They know that trying to conquer everyone at once is impossible.
 2. They desire to get people into the smaller groups where they can begin to change the minds of some.
- B. They are working diligently among our youth.
 1. Many youth rallies over the past twenty years have been havens for these workers of iniquity.
 2. They have argued that we needed to do things differently with our youth to keep them.
 3. They began bringing in singing groups to replace congregational singing at the rallies.
 4. Then singing groups which mimicked the sounds of mechanical instruments began to be used.
 5. Groups were encouraged to “let the Spirit move them” as they began to express themselves with:
 - a. Swaying
 - b. Raised hands and arms
 - c. Clapping
 - d. Becoming more and more charismatic

METHOD #4 - THEY DENY THE AUTHORITY OF ELDERS TO RULE.

- A. God’s Word gives elders the authority to oversee, guide, rule within the local congregation.
 1. **Hebrews 13:17** - “Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be

unprofitable for you.”

2. **1 Thessalonians 5:12** - “And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you.”

3. **1 Peter 5:2** - “Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers . . .”

B. It is most unfortunate that a number of congregations have appointed men who were not qualified or who were not willing to do the work of an elder.

1. Therefore, elderships in many places have lost the respect of brethren.

2. Elders have not taken the lead and therefore preachers, because of their prominent positions and persuasive speech, have taken over churches.

3. I heard of one preacher some years ago that had made the statement that he would never work with a congregation that had elders. That speaks volumes.

4. A number of years ago at one on our Christian colleges where I taught, the dean of students wrote a book designed for use in Bible classes wherein he said that elders only have that authority given to them by the church.

5. Again, when we are teaching our youth these things and influencing Bible classes with these kinds of studies, elders become only puppets to be used by preachers to accomplish their purposes.

6. When elderships cannot be overthrown, change agents are encouraged to gain influence among the elders that they do not make any decisions without the preacher present and okaying the decision.

7. Constantly in their writings they are addressing what “you” the preacher (change agent) needs to do.

8. They do not write saying that the elders need to do, or that the church needs to do anything, but that “you” need to do these things.

METHOD #5 - THEY TEACH THE DIRECT OPERATION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

A. They believe that the Holy Spirit directly guides them separate and apart from the Word of God.

1. They have been teaching this for years and are so persuasive that some among more conservative brethren have been taken up in this doctrine.

2. If the church can be made to believe that these men are directly guided by the Holy Spirit, how can any one argue that what they are doing or saying is wrong? Who can question?

a. Lynn Anderson speaks of the “vision” he has been given.

b. If brethren believe that these men have truly been give a vision by God, who can stand in the way of changes.

c. Shall they take us into the changed church as Joseph Smith carried his followers into Mormonism because he had received a “vision” from God.?

B. Brethren and friends, the Holy Spirit works through His revelation, and if when brethren are carried away from the Bible being the standard of faith, we open the floodgates to modernism and denominationalism.

METHOD #6 - THEY EMPHASIZE LOVE, MERCY, GRACE, AND THE CROSS.

A. Some have even suggested that these are themes brethren have not taught through the years.

1. Though it is true that these things have not been taught as these change agents are teaching them, every faithful preacher ever has preached on these beloved themes over and over again.

B. They deny that the church is under law.

1. They teach that we are not under law . . . any law.

2. They are now saying that we are saved by grace alone, without man adding “one whit” to his salvation.

3. They are arguing that man has nothing to do in being saved.

4. Whenever they mention commands or law keeping they do so in disparaging ways and even mock the idea that we must do anything to be saved. Whenever this happens, the plan of salvation is abandoned and given up.

SUMMARY TO THIS POINT: To this point:

- They have had us give up the Bible as our standard.
- They have worked to corrupt our worship.
- They have changed the plan of salvation.
- They have changed the organization of the church.

Remember that these things are being done in the church. If the devil can cause the church to give up any of these things we have ceased to be the church of Christ.

METHOD #7 - THEY ARE REDEFINING BIBLE TERMS, PRACTICES, AND DOCTRINES.

A. They take the “doctrine of Christ” in 2 John 9-11 and say this is not the Gospel, the New Testament, but the teachings about Jesus. Let’s read the passage: **2 John 9-11** - “Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son.

If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him;
for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.”

1. The passage says in verse 9 “in the doctrine of Christ,” not doctrine about Christ.

2. The doctrine of Christ is the Gospel message.

3. There is a great deal of difference in those things Jesus taught and those things taught about Jesus.
- B. Bill Love in his book The Core Gospel argues that the faith to which we must subscribe, the one faith, are only the seven ones of Ephesians 4:4-6 as defined by him.
1. Instrumental music, baptism for the remission of sins, etc., are not a part of the seven ones and since they are not, we can fellowship all those who acknowledge that there is one God, one Lord, one Holy Spirit, one faith, one baptism, one hope, and one body.
 2. This fellowship extends to all those who believe in these things even when they may be teaching totally contrary things concerning these ones.
- C. They say they are continuing to baptize and that charges that they are not teaching baptism are false.
1. However, they teach that denominational baptism is accepted of God.
 2. Some argue that one does not have to know that he is being baptized for the remission of sins.
 3. They say that whether you believe your sins were forgiven before or after baptism is a moot point.
- D. They use many of the denominational arguments for their practices and the sad part is that they have helped to rear an ignorant membership who cannot answer these false teachers and their doctrines.

METHOD #8 - THEY TEACH THEIR CHANGE AGENTS THAT CHANGE IS ALWAYS MET WITH RESISTANCE.

- A. Ronnie White said, “If you change too fast some people will leave; if you change too slow, others leave; either way it hurts.” This is quoted by Lynn Anderson in his article “Change Without Chaos.”
1. This is the principle of the frog in hot water . . . just a little increase in the temperature at a time will not cause the frog to jump.
 2. Lynn Anderson suggests that opposition will first come denying any changes being made, but with persistence the opposition will come back with a compromise.
 - a. He further says that a compromise is only a slow down to change and not a stoppage.
 - b. This is viewed as a victory by the change agents.

METHOD #9 - THEY SAY CHANGE WILL NOT COME WITHOUT DISEQUILIBRIUM.

- A. They suggest that changing too quickly will cause folks to dig in their heels.

1. Anderson suggests pushing the church to the brink and then when you see the church about to go over the edge back off and preach on safe topics for a while.
2. Then push them back to the brink.
3. Again each time this will take them a little further from who they have been and are.

METHOD #10 - MAINTAIN OPTIONS.

A. Offer different ways of doing things.

1. A suggestion is made that singing during the Lord’s Supper is met with opposition, but the answer is: this week have those who love their brethren to help them worship silently during partaking of the Lord’s supper then next week to have those silent ones to love the ones who enjoy singing during the Lord’s Supper.
2. One week we sing during communion and the next we reflect silently.
3. Anderson says this keeps options available.
4. He further contends that if you do not want to do this from week to week, it will be because you do not love your brethren.
5. Incidentally, later in his article he mentions how that they used a trio of girls to sing during the communion.

METHOD #11 - STAND WITH THE CONSERVATIVE BRETHREN.

A. Acknowledge that you feel uncomfortable with instrumental music but show how open-minded you are and therefore lead the more conservative into these questionable practices.

1. You see, the more liberal brethren do not need your leadership, only your support.
2. The more conservative are the ones with whom you must work to bring along.
3. The opposition to change will come from those who are more conservative and the best ways to bring them along is to lead them from within, not try to drive them from without.

METHOD #12 - WHEN ALL ELSE FAILS CALL FOR THE UNCHANGING BRETHREN TO LOVE YOU AND HELP YOU TO “PLANT A CHURCH” IN THE COMMUNITY WHICH WILL ALLOW YOU TO EXPRESS YOURSELF MORE FREELY.

- A. If you cannot bring change where you are seek their support to bring it elsewhere.
- B. I fear that some faithful brethren would be willing to do this just to get rid of the “trouble makers.”

C. Brethren, do not forget what the apostle John wrote in 2 John 10-11 about bidding them Godspeed. **2 John 10-11** - “If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.”

CONCLUSION:

A. We have noted “Twelve Methods Used by Change Agents” to change the Lord’s church from faithfulness to denominationalism. The twelve methods were:

1. They begin by changing those things that are matters of expediency (in order to introduce change).
2. They deny that we have a pattern to follow.
3. The work to divide and conquer.
4. They deny the authority of elders to rule.
5. They teach the direct operation of the holy Spirit.
6. They emphasize love, mercy, grace, and the cross.
7. They are redefining Bible terms, practices, and doctrines.
8. They teach their change agents that change is always met with resistance.
9. They say change will not come without disequilibrium.
10. They teach that options should be maintained.
11. They teach their people to stand with conservative brethren (to bring them along).
12. When all else fails call for the unchanging brethren to love you and help you to “plant” a church in the community which will allow you to express yourself more freely. (Fund their errors)

B. To change from right to wrong may be easier for some than one might think.

1. Twelve of the various methods used have been examined in this study.
2. Be warned: Many people accept change and false doctrine because it is taught by a man they admire or love.
 - a. Some people fall in love with the man and then with his teaching.
 - b. Most false teachers and change agents understand this, and therefore, make themselves as agreeable as possible so as to get a favorable hearing.
 - c. **Romans 16:17-18** - “Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them.

For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple.”

C. Brethren:

1. **The Bible has not changed! The Word of God does not read differently today than it ever has.**

Matthew 24:35 - “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.”

2. **The pattern has not changed!**

1 Timothy 1:16 - “However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life.”

3. **The Lord has not changed!**

Hebrews 13:8 - “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.”

4. **Let us make sure that we do not change from the pattern given by God in the Gospel.**

Ephesians 4:14 - “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.”

D. Brethren, we stand warned from the precious Scriptures of God.

1. **Proverbs 23:10** - “Do not remove the ancient landmark . . .”

2. **11 John 7** - “For many deceivers have gone out into the world . . .”

3. **Jude 4** - “For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ.”

4. **Titus 1:11** - “Paul speaks of those “whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole households, teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest gain.”

5. **Hebrews 3:12-13** - “Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God;

but exhort one another daily, while it is called “Today,” lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.”

E. Our goal is to hear our Lord say to us, “Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord” (**Matthew 25:21**).

F. Friends:

1. There is no substitute for **TRUTH**.

2. There is no substitute for **THE BIBLE**.

3. There is no substitute for **BIBLICAL AUTHORITY**.

4. There is no substitute for **BIBLICAL PATTERNS**.

5. There is no substitute for **GOD’S WAY**.

6. There is no substitute for the **LORD’S CHURCH**.

7. There is no substitute for the **GOSPEL**.

8. There is no substitute for **OBEDIENCE**.

9. There is no substitute for **FAITHFULNESS**.

10. There is no substitute for **ACCEPTABLE WORSHIP**.

11. There is no substitute for **PLEASING GOD**.

12. There is no substitute for **THE LORD’S PLAN FOR YOU SALVATION**.

G. Let the Bible change you . . . but do not let you change the Bible!

H. **God’s Plan for Man’s Salvation**