

Always

BY DAVID JEREMIAH

Years ago, a young boy straps his knife (for cutting stuff) and .22 pistol (for snakes) to his belt, sticks a bottle of soda in his back pocket, hops on his bike (without a helmet) and pedals to a river bank (alone) to spend the day fishing and swimming. Fifty years later, the same spot has a big sign posted that says “RECREATION AREA: No Fishing, Hunting, Swimming, or Glass Bottles. Violators Will Be Fined.”

Recreation? It seems more like re-creation, doesn't it? For better or worse (I'll let you decide), it seems that life is no longer like it always used to be. I can certainly identify with the recollection I just cited. So much has changed in our society just in my lifetime that I have to read the headlines every morning in order to stay current. Things that I thought would always be true are proving to be elusive.

Remember when Bible reading and prayer were part of the average day in public schools? Remember when America was the freest nation on earth? (According to the *Index of Economic Freedom*, America was fifth freest in 2008, eighth freest in 2010, and ninth freest in 2011.) Remember when anyone could start a business without plowing through a mountain of regulations, assessments, fees, restrictions, licenses, permits, and other legalese? Yes, some changes are for safety and other benefits. But the average person has a feeling that what was “always” true is being redefined in our cultural dictionary.

“Always” has become a relative term. The largest investment bank on Wall Street says, “Our clients’ interests always come first.”² In light of the 2008 financial meltdown, in which Wall Street banks played a prominent role, one wonders if “always” still means always. A Fortune 500 aerospace company says, “We never forget who we’re working for.”³ “Never forget” is another way of saying “always remember”—and we can only hope it’s true. One of the largest insurance companies in the world uses the mountainous “rock of Gibraltar” as its symbol—a geographic landmark that has “always” been there—to say the company will always be there for its customers.

I certainly applaud what “always” represents in the marketplace: constancy, loyalty, faithfulness, priorities, and the like. But given the ever-changing nature of values, morals, and standards in our society, the average person doesn’t put a lot of stock in the word “always” any more. And that has a troubling impact on the spiritual life.

I can’t prove the following scientifically, but I doubt if you will disagree: We are products, to a degree, of our environment—and that includes our spiritual life. Without even knowing it, our thinking about the idea of “always” is subtly influenced by the environment in which we live. If “always” starts to

mean “sometimes” in our culture, we are likely to think that way when we read the Bible. It happens slowly, but it happens. That’s why Paul warns us, “Don’t let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould, but let God re-mould your minds from within...” (Romans 12:2, New Testament in Modern English by J. B. Phillips).

If we are not on our guard, when the Bible says “always” about God, we might wonder if He really is always like that—loving, faithful, good, loyal, or patient. We can begin to think of God as fickle, as capricious, as unreliable, as devious, as changing, just like we think of things in our society.

For example, in Malachi 3:6a God says, “For I *am* the LORD, I do not change.” Really? You and I change. Companies change. Governments change. Laws change. Is God *a/ways* the same? Can He be depended on without fear that a promise made yesterday will be broken tomorrow? Can I go to bed to-night knowing that the God to whom I bid “Good night” will be the same God to whom I say “Good morning”?

Friend, that is at the heart of our faith! If we can’t believe that “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Hebrews 13:8), then what good is faith? If we don’t believe that God “does not lie or change his mind” (1 Samuel 15:29, NIV), how can we trust Him? We know that “great men are not *a/ways* wise” (Job 32:9), so how do we remain confident that Jesus will be “with [us] always, *even* to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20)?

There is a lot riding on God’s “always-ness”—in fact, *everything* is riding on it. “Always” may be an empty promise in today’s world, but it is a fact in God’s world. When the Bible says “always” about God, always is what it means.



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¹ <http://www.nationalreview.com/articles/257616/america-s-economy-ninth-freest-deroy-murdock> (accessed on 7-16-12)

² <http://www.goldmansachs.com/who-we-are/business-standards/business-principles/index.html> (accessed 7-16-12)

³ <http://www.lockheedmartin.com/us/who-we-are/global.html> (accessed 7-16-12)