

# Never Changing, but Always Changing: Pharmacists as Followers of Christ

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*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Hebrews 13:8 (ESV)*

At no other time in recent memory has there been such an upheaval in the delivery of healthcare as we are now experiencing in the United States. Everything from implementation of the Affordable Care Act to advances in technology and individualized medicine are rapidly changing the way that healthcare is delivered. These changes have challenged the foundations upon which our healthcare system has been built. Questions revolving around access to care, who can deliver healthcare, an emphasis on quality and value rather than quantity, patient control over personal health information, and ethical or religious issues related to healthcare have been raised.

As with any change, there has been a great amount of anxiety and concern with the changes occurring in healthcare. For some people, they have seen great opportunities, and others paint a more pessimistic view that our entire healthcare system is in danger of collapse. These perspectives are no different in pharmacy. The tying of quality measures to reimbursement for services is viewed as a threat to many community pharmacies, especially independent pharmacies. Likewise, hospitals in smaller communities feel threatened. On the other hand, new avenues for reimbursement of clinical pharmacy services, such as medication therapy management, open new vistas of opportunities for pharmacists. Steps being taken toward pharmacists obtaining provider status have the potential to greatly impact the

future of the profession. All of these changes make us uncomfortable as we scramble to adjust, retool, and envision what the future may be.

How often do we hear this verse quoted, especially when changes are clearly evident? During times of change, Christians do have an unchanging foundation upon whom they can build, Jesus Christ.

Many people cite this verse in an attempt to oppose a perceived shift in a societal norm or value. We also repeat this verse when we are overwhelmed by change. In many ways the truth expressed in Hebrews becomes a refuge or shelter in the storms of life, but little thought is given to what it means or how it applies to life. On one hand Jesus never changes, but it is also true that everything changes with Jesus. In a world that is constantly changing and is based on a system fundamentally opposed to Christ, it is important to understand the idea that Jesus never changes, but always changes things.

It is easy to understand how taking refuge in a never changing Christ brings a sense of security and comfort. As God, Jesus' character, personhood, values, attributes, and abilities never change. He is consistently loving and powerful, as stated in Psalm 62:11. This allows Him to always be perfect in the exercise of righteousness, justice, compassion, forgiveness, and judgment. It also empowers Him to completely keep His promises, such as enabling every tribe and family to hear the Gospel, fulfilling prophesy, and returning to establish a new heaven and earth. The certainty of

who Christ is allows Him to be, as many have stated, a shelter during the storms of life.

Another component of Christ never changing is the ongoing work of salvation. Since the beginning of creation, God's plan and desire has been to have his creation worship and follow Him. Jesus Christ is the guarantee that this plan will be accomplished. The unchangeableness of Christ makes assurance of God's plan possible in our lives and in all of creation. Otherwise, we would be lost in the futility of overcoming sin that taints and distorts everything in us and around us.

In addition to the unchanging nature of Jesus Christ, His word and commands are unchanging. Scripture makes this clear when the Word is equated with Jesus in John 1 and we are told that the word abides forever in I Peter. The inescapable conclusion is that the instruction and directives of Scripture are unchangeable. The commands of Scripture are given to allow us to both understand God and to know how to live life in God's way. These are never changing. Jesus made this imminently clear when He repeatedly told his followers that to follow Him meant obeying His commands, and that His commands were from the Father.

With the certainty of Jesus being unchangeable is the reality that when He enters into a situation everything becomes changeable. We live a very broken world with very broken relationships between people. The system of the world is fully tainted by sin and people are enslaved to sin. Whatever we see, touch, feel, experience, or encounter in this world is directly impacted by sin, making it impossible for people to distinguish

between righteous or unrighteous, justice or injustice, and good or wickedness. With Jesus Christ being consistently good and unchangeable in His perfection, any time He is present the entire paradigm changes. Molds and patterns of doing things according to the systems of this earth are broken and challenged by the unchanging goodness of Christ.

By this point, you are probably asking yourself how this relates to the changes in healthcare that we are currently experiencing. As followers of Christ, we are called to be obedient to Him and His representatives in this world. Paul puts this in terms of us being ambassadors of Christ, representing Him and His unchangeable character, purposes, and commands to the world. Our presence and engagement in the discussion and implementation of healthcare changes should bring the perspective of Christ to the table. In the design, implementation, and response to changes in our healthcare system the unchangeable values and perspective of Christ should be upheld by those who follow Him.

So, how does this get done? The topic of healthcare reform is so large and complex that it is beyond the scope of this article to fully address. However, the following are thoughts and suggestions to consider in this process and how they relate to unchangeable characteristics, values, or commands of Christ.

**Righteousness:** One of the major themes that we hear repeatedly about the new and old healthcare systems is the presence of fraud to the extent that it costs millions of dollars annually. Do we as followers of Christ participate, knowingly or unknowingly in schemes or processes that promote fraudulent activities? Do we take a stand against fraud

when we see it being practiced? Are we supportive of reasonable measures designed to prevent fraud from being present in the healthcare system.

**Justice:** Two examples come to mind as it relates to justice. The first is the recent scandal in the Veterans Administration healthcare system. Is it just that veterans were prevented from seeing physicians or receiving medical care? Did Christians within the system take steps to resolve the problems in scheduling and conflicting lists of patients seeking medical care?

A second example is highly disparate access to high quality medical care, dependent upon race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, or geographic location. How do we as Christians take steps to increase access to care, not only through participation in indigent care or 340b clinics, but through addressing systemic problems with the healthcare delivery? Do we advocate for those individuals who have limited access to quality care?

**Compassion:** Repeatedly we see Christ in Scripture extending compassion to many who were in need. He routinely breaks social and religious norms to extend compassion, and meet the physical needs of people. All too often people seeking care in the healthcare system are treated like numbers and sources of revenue, rather than individuals who are needy, hurting, and in need of compassionate care. Are we willing to express compassion and care in the way that Jesus did? Do we address issues in the healthcare system that are dehumanizing and do not allow for compassionate care? *(continued)*

**Quality:** One of the major shifts occurring in healthcare delivery is a shift from an emphasis on volume to an emphasis on quality of care as it relates to reimbursement. As Christians, we are instructed to do our work as unto Christ. If this is done, then quality becomes more important than quantity. What is

most important to us in our practice, quality or quantity? Are we willing to go out of the way to ensure that the highest quality of care is delivered to each patient?

Much more could be said and explored as it relates to the upheaval in healthcare we are experiencing.

As Christians we can find refuge in the unchangeable Christ even during times of unparalleled change. However, while this may be a refuge it also compels us to bring to bear the unchangeable in a way that results in revolutionary approaches to the health needs of our friends, families, colleagues, and patients. ✨

## Transformation by Amy Holmes, PharmD



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Change is hard. Even so, change is built into our design by our Creator. Nature exhibits change in the variation of seasons and the cycle of life. Perhaps the most classic example is the caterpillar that disappears into a chrysalis and emerges a butterfly.

David praised God for being “wonderfully and fearfully made.” Consider the changes that humans experience from infancy into adulthood. Arguably one of the most painful changes that we go through is puberty- a clear example of a necessary trial that ends with an ultimate

transition to our adult self. Indeed we are wonderfully and fearfully made.

It is not just our physical self that changes. Spiritually, the Bible speaks to the plans that God has for our transformation. “...who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.” Philippians 3:21 (NASB)

God shows us in His Word that through Him we will be changed to be separate from this world. Change is

a necessary part of spiritual growth. “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” Romans 12:2 (ESV)

Nineteen years ago, during the summer following my first year in pharmacy school, Drs. Doug Hepler and Linda Strand first coined the phrase “pharmaceutical care”, ushering in a new era in the profession of pharmacy. It was a huge step away from the “lick, stick, count, and pour” perception of pharmacists. In the time since that paper was published, the integration of pharmacists into the medical team has become more widespread. Pharmacist- run clinics abound. Patients receive immunizations from their neighborhood pharmacist.

Credentialing, privileging, and recognition of pharmacists as providers is the hot topic now. This serves as evidence that the profession continues to grow and change.

For the last two years, my institution has been engaged in “transformation.” Our ultimate goal is to have nurses and pharmacists operating at the top of our licenses by delegating non-clinical duties to support staff as able. Taking on more clinical responsibility is new and exciting for some, but scary and intimidating for others. As we approach our “go live” date for computerized physician order entry, some of our staff members are preparing to assume a more clinical role than ever before in their career. This change has been planned, discussed, feared, and dreaded, but it cannot be avoided.

Considering change as part of the ultimate design may help improve our attitude toward it, but may not always make it easier. Pharmacy is definitely a career that seems to constantly undergo change. It can be hard to keep up the pace. Not only are new drugs constantly coming to market, but the role of the pharmacist is changing as well. All of this change can be stressful and overwhelming. Asking for guidance and grace during times of big transition will help alleviate the burdens it can cause. ✨