

Are You a Misfit?

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Are you a misfit? Probably. The fact that you are reading this makes it likely that you are a spiritual misfit. If you are like me you sometimes feel that you do not “fit” into the world, your culture, even your village or town. Like me, many of you have rejected religious traditions you received from fathers and mothers, family and friends, teachers or clergy. This probably caused some drastic changes – even severe conflicts – with those same people. Some of you have gone from organization to organization searching for spiritual understanding and truth. This is a sign of misfit-ism.¹

One of the formative authors of my college years was the immigrant blue-collar philosopher by the name of Eric Hoffer. Of several books composed over decades of working as a manual laborer, migrant farmworker and longshoreman, one of his important books was *The Ordeal of Change*. It was a discussion of the impact that drastic change has on individuals and societies.

The Role of Drastic Change in Life

Hoffer points out that one of the distinctive characteristics about America and other immigrant societies (which could include countries such as Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Canada, and even Israel and Palestinians after World War II) was that the uprooting of the immigrants from their culture, society, families, a ripping-up of their basic attachments that identify their place in life, causing these people to be misfits.

Regarding America, Hoffer writes,

The millions of immigrants dumped on our shores after the Civil War underwent a tremendous change, and it was a highly irritating and painful experience. Not only were they transferred, almost overnight, to a wholly foreign world, but they were, for the most part,

1. Yes, I am coining a new word, “misfitism.” If the churches can create whole new non-biblical doctrines out of nothing, then I can coin a new theological term.

torn from the warm communal existence of a small town or village somewhere in Europe and exposed to the cold and dismal isolation of an individual existence. (Eric Hoffer, *Between the Devil and the Dragon*, p. 148²)

Change brings stress. Even change in everyday events can affect how we approach new situations. Hoffer relates that for months in the summer of 1936 he was in California picking peas, going from field to field until all the peas of the season were picked. He observed the hesitation he had when he switched to picking string beans. He wondered if he would be able to do it.³

So, too, a young lady of my acquaintance had a terrible fear of each new school year, from kindergarten up through her first two years of college. Every year she had such a dread of the new situations that she experienced severe stress, tears and even mild illness. Fear of the new, fear of change.

Hoffer's experience and the young lady's stress of each new school year are mild compared to the effects of drastic change. It is now well known that major life changes, whether good or bad, marriage or divorce, a new job or the loss of an old one, losing a house or moving to a new one, a birth or a death in the family – all these major life changes can cause considerable stress. Several such changes occurring within a short period of time can cause so much stress as to be life-threatening.

Hoffer explains what he means by “drastic change,”

In the case of drastic change, the uneasiness is of course deeper and more lasting. We can never be really prepared for that which is wholly new. We have to adjust ourselves, and every radical adjustment is a crisis in self-esteem: we undergo a test, we have to prove ourselves. It needs inordinate self-confidence to face drastic change without inner trembling. (Hoffer, p. 147, “The Role of Traditions”)

Sometimes change is voluntary and sometimes change is forced upon us. Traditions help us cope with such changes. Traditions of culture, ritual and religion were created by societies to assist in dealing with the major events which life hands out to each of us. These events are cataloged in the book of Ecclesiastes,

To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven.

A time to be born – and a time to die;

A time to plant – and a time to pluck up that which is planted;

A time to kill – and a time to heal;

A time to break down – and a time to build up;

A time to weep – and a time to laugh;

2. All references to Eric Hoffer's work are taken from *Between the Devil and the Dragon: The Best Essays and Aphorisms of Eric Hoffer* (New York: Harper & Row, 1982). Passages selected are from his work *The Ordeal of Change*.

3. Hoffer, p. 147. Hoffer goes on, “A population subjected to drastic change is a population of misfits – unbalanced, explosive and hungry for action. Action is the most obvious way by which to gain confidence and prove our worth, and it is also a reaction against loss of balance ... Thus drastic change is one of the agencies which release man's energies” (p. 148).

*A time to mourn – and a time to dance;
A time to cast away stones – and a time to gather stones together;
A time to embrace – and a time to refrain from embracing;
A time to get – and a time to lose;
A time to keep – and a time to cast away;
A time to rend – and a time to sew;
A time to keep silence – and a time to speak;
A time to love – and a time to hate;
A time of war – and a time of peace.*

(Ecclesiastes 3:1-8)

This biblical passage is about significant life events. These are events common to the human condition, but events that are not routine to the individual.

Every society in history has developed traditions and rituals that attempt to ease the impact of these life changes. Community is built upon the shared experiences of such changes. The Law of Moses, which came from God, has comments and rules on most every aspect of the “times” listed in Ecclesiastes. At times a change can threaten the established order and traditions. Read the story of Stephen, especially Acts 6:13-14 where they murdered him for preaching things that threatened to “*change the customs which Moses delivered to us.*”

So, too, the Body of Christ has been built through common endurance of drastic change. Does this idea seem absurd? It should not. You have been changed because you have been saved – and you realize it.⁴

You Have Already Been Changed

You are a misfit because you have already been changed; taken by God, step by step, from your religious roots, rituals and traditions and planted somewhere else, as it were. In fact, you have been placed in the category of being a “*new creation.*”

Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature [a new creation], old things are passed away, behold, all things are become new[!] All things are of God who has reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ (II Corinthians 5:17).

*For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision avails any thing, nor uncircumcision, **but** [you are] **a new creation** (Galatians 6:15).*

That is substantial change from those who have not had that change. You are something else altogether than those around you who do not know God. It is not a change that is experienced or felt, yet it is real.

4. See the articles on the *Associates for Scriptural Knowledge* website (www.askelm.com), *The Way to Salvation in the Christian Gospel* and *By Grace Are You Saved*.

You Are in Good Company

I considered many of the major actors (good and evil) of the Old and New Testaments who were moved by God to various places and had drastic changes occur in their lives, all so they would perform God's purposes in history and in the story of salvation. Most of them were misfits! Here are just a few examples.

Adam was a misfit. He started in the midst of the Garden, but was cast out of the Garden into Eden (Genesis 3:23). He was a misfit and was forced to accept a major change by leaving the Garden.

Noah was a misfit. Both in the preparation of the ark for so many years, and then the flood. Noah did not fit in with his society. All should admit, the flood was a bit of a change.

Abraham was a misfit. More than once God uprooted him from his home, family, traditions and society, and told him to move, first from Mesopotamia to Haran with Terah, then to Canaan (Genesis 12:1–5), where he was promised an inheritance of land. Later, during a famine, he moved to Egypt, then moved with Lot to Bethel. Later he moved again to Gerar (Genesis 20:1). While there may not seem to be much of a change (because he was a nomad), remember that Abraham grew up in the city of Haran in Mesopotamia.⁵

Jacob was certainly a misfit. He uprooted himself to Haran to escape Esau (Genesis 27:43), stopped in Bethel where he saw the Gate of Heaven (Genesis 28:17), lived with Laban in Haran, moved back to Canaan, and later went to Egypt during the famine, being rescued by God through Joseph.

Esau was a misfit. He moved from Canaan to Mount Seir where some of them reside today (Genesis 36:5-8).

Joseph was a misfit. He was uprooted from his family and home through the treachery of his brothers, and taken to Egypt in a seemingly horrible situation that turned out to the benefit of Israel.

Moses was a misfit. Several times everything in life changed for Moses: when he escaped from Egypt at age 40, moving again back to Egypt when he was 80 to lead Israel across the Red Sea, and then spent 40 years in the Wilderness leading the children of Israel.

The people of Israel were misfits. As a people they were uprooted from slavery in Egypt, wandered 40 years in the Wilderness, finally planted themselves in Canaan, then were constantly under threat and rescued by the Judges of Israel.

David was a misfit. After a comfortable yet eventful childhood, David was hunted around Canaan and Philistia by King Saul, eventually settling down to a new job – as King of Israel. Later he was threatened by several rebellions, having to run for his life several times.

5. Note that Abraham did not receive the full inheritance promised to him by God. That will come at the resurrection.

The Prophets were misfits. The uprooting of the Prophets of Israel was almost continuous. Many of them never wanted to be Prophets, but were drafted into the position by God, without being asked.

The apostles were misfits. The apostles were uprooted from their lives to fulfill Jesus's commission to them as "fishers of men."

The early church was a group of misfits. Many were persecuted out of Judea.

You are a misfit. You have been changed by Christ's death and resurrection. This is the major change of your life so far. Your sins have been imputed to Him (II Corinthians 5:19-21). His righteousness has been imputed to you (Philippians 3:8-9 and Ephesians 2:8-9). In fact, you have something in common with most major figures of the Bible. They were misfits like you. As a result of this change the apostle Paul instructs,

*And be you **renewed in the spirit of your mind**, and that you put on the New Man [a new humanity], which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness (Ephesians 2:24).*

What Signifies a "Spiritual Misfit"

A spiritual misfit is easily understood by what you hold to be true and how far it deviates from religious traditions you have been taught. Here are several examples:

- ◆ If you believe that Jesus Christ fulfilled the Law of Moses in every possible way, and that you are no longer bound to act out that law for infants – **then you are a spiritual misfit.**⁶
- ◆ If you understand the imputation of sins to Christ and imputation of Christ's righteousness to you (Ephesians 2:5-6) – **then you are a spiritual misfit.**⁷
- ◆ If you comprehend that you died on the tree of crucifixion when Christ died (in our place) on that tree (Colossians 2:11-13; Galatians 2:20) – **then you are a spiritual misfit.**
- ◆ If you understand that the phrase "immortal soul" is not in the Bible, that the concept is in fact a pagan doctrine, that at death the soul ceases to exist until the resurrection, and that Christ "*only has immortality*" (I Timothy 6:16) – **then you are a spiritual misfit.**
- ◆ If you grasp the concept that God's revelation to man in the Bible was progressive and ever enlarged in scope, up to and including the capstone teaching of the Mystery – **then you are a spiritual misfit.**
- ◆ If you can prove there is no "Hell" and that it too has a pagan origin – **then you are a spiritual misfit.**
- ◆ If you know the concept of "eternity" does not exist in the Bible, that time has a beginning and an end, and that the Hebrew word *olam* and the Greek word *aion* do not mean "forever" or "eternity" – **then you are likely a spiritual misfit.**
- ◆ If you believe, like the apostle Paul, that your human will is weaker than God's will, that His will is supreme, and that,

6. See the chapter 1, "The Law of God" in Ernest Martin's *Essential of New Testament Doctrine*, pp. 1-24.

7. See chapters 6, 7 and 8 of *Essentials*.

*This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, Who **will** have all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth ... Who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time (I Timothy 2:3-4, 6),⁸*

– **then you are a spiritual misfit.**

- ◆ If you believe that all people, regardless of time or situation, will come to a full knowledge of the truth (see above, I Timothy 2:4) – **then you are a spiritual misfit.**
- ◆ If it is your understanding that your beliefs should be guided by the statements of Scripture and not by the traditions of men or organizations – **then you are a spiritual misfit.**
- ◆ If you feel that “creeds” of belief are mostly unnecessary (and if such statements of belief are necessary they should simply list the relevant biblical verses) – **then you are a spiritual misfit.**
- ◆ If you are uncomfortable with religious people and clergy who choose to wear clothes different from non-clergy to set themselves apart from “ordinary” people – **then you are a spiritual misfit.**⁹
- ◆ If you are able to recognize the silliness of occult and sexual symbols on religious buildings of worship and wonder why they are there, and whether the worshippers or clergy know what they mean – **then you are a spiritual misfit.**
- ◆ If you recognize that most traditions of modern Christian denominations are pale copies of the ordained Old Testament Law of Moses that was for a specific people under specific circumstances – **then you are a spiritual misfit.**
- ◆ If you understand that tithes:
 - can **only** be given from agriculture or animal production;
 - can **only** be received by Levites;
 - **only** pertain to Israelites;
 - not given according to the Law **is a sin** to the giver;
 - can **only** be received when a Temple or Tabernacle is in existence;
 - received by **any** ministers, priests, imams or rabbis today is a sin¹⁰

– **then you are a spiritual misfit.**

- ◆ If you accept what the apostle Paul writes, simply and clearly, to the Corinthians that,

*There is none other God but one ... There is one God, the Father, of Whom are all things, and we in Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by Whom are all things and we by him, howbeit **there is not in every man that knowledge** ... (I Corinthians 8:4, 6; c.f. I Timothy 2:5).*

– **then you are a spiritual misfit.**

8. God does everything according to “*the pleasure of His will.*” See Ephesians 1:5, 9; Philippians 2:13; II Thessalonians 1:11.

9. I like the hats they wear. Someday I may start collecting religious hats and wear them around the house.

10. See Dr. Martin’s book, *The Tithing Dilemma*

- ◆ If you believe that verse and the context in which it was given, and to whom it was given,¹¹ and you understand that God is not an unbiblical (and incomprehensible) Trinity

– **then you are a spiritual misfit.**

Look back over your life. Each one of you could tell me about the hurdles you have overcome, the errors you have corrected, the persecutions you have suffered, the hatreds you have endured; all because you believed differently than the traditions you were raised with and made decisions to believe the Word of God.

Education

Let me return once more to Eric Hoffer regarding the goal of education. It can help cope with change.

The central task of education is to implant a will and facility for learning; it should produce not learned but learning people. The truly human society is a learning society, where grand-parents, parents and children are students together. (Hoffer, p. 146.)

To put it another way, the purpose of education is to teach you how to learn.

Many people ask, “Why doesn’t God communicate with me directly?” Well, He has and He is doing so now, through the Holy Scriptures. If you ignore it, avoid it,¹² or use it merely as a salve for your emotions, then you are disregarding an important tool that can increase your understanding of God and His purpose for you in the scheme of creation. While using the Scriptures for comfort is not wrong, too many people use the Bible only for that purpose – to feel that God loves them. If you truly love someone, as I presume you love God, then you should want to learn everything you can about God the Father and His Son.

Such knowledge and understanding can lead to wisdom. It is a life-long process without an end until death. Wisdom can help you deal with the changes that occur in your life, the lives of others and the frightening changes ahead in the world (see Proverbs 4:6, 11-12).

In a time of drastic change *it is the learners who inherit the future*. The learned usually find themselves equipped to live in a world that no longer exists. (Hoffer, p. 146, emphasis mine.)

Drastic change is coming on the world scene in events that will shatter the minds and emotions of many. These changes will come sooner rather than later. The “misfits,” especially spiritual misfits like you and me, will cope with that change better than anyone. Then we can help others cope with drastic changes in their lives and surroundings.

11. Remember that the Corinthian people Paul was writing to were “babes” in Christ. If the Trinity was a basic Christian doctrine, would Paul have addressed it at this time? Of course he would. Remember that the context of I Corinthians 8 was about false gods? What Paul wrote in I Corinthians 8:4-6 was what Paul wanted them to know as basic doctrine. By the way, I was specifically taught in seminary that the Trinity is not provable, not comprehensible, that it is “alluded to” in the Bible, and that it was permissible for Church councils to expand, elucidate and enforce the doctrine that was not taught in the Bible. This was taught in a Protestant seminary.

12. In my experience most churches avoid the Bible like the plague. Some denominations in the past even forbade their members to read the Bible (under penalty of death) and prefer that the sheep of their flock obey traditions of men rather than read the Bible.

Drastic Change in Your Future

As a new creation, God is equipping you now to inherit the future, whether at the moment of your resurrection from the dead or at the time of the Second Coming of Christ. You will be properly equipped because God is doing a work for you, with you and through you,

For it is God which works in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure. Do all things without murmurings and disputings, that you may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world (Philippians 2:13–15).

If you are already doing that, being a light to the world, then you are performing God's will in your life.

Your coming change from mortal to immortal, from a fleshly nature to a spiritual nature, from a physical body to a spiritual body at the moment of the resurrection (I Corinthians 15); for you to inherit your place with Christ (that you possess legally at this moment) as a member of the Body of Christ at the right hand of God the Father – all these drastic changes will occur at the same moment – but you will cope with them well. As Paul wrote, quoting from Isaiah 64:4,¹³

As it is written, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him." But God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit: for the Spirit searches all things, yea, the deep things of God (I Corinthians 2:9-10).

That change will be drastic, but not stressful,

In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed ... (I Corinthians 15:52).

Then ... finally ... you will no longer be a misfit. You will be home.

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13. Quotes from the Old Testament in the New Testament should be read in both places. New Testament authors quote for a reason.

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