

The Bride, Chapter 6 – What Changes and What Doesn't

In Chapter 5, we look at the difference between a Metropolitan and a Neighborhood mentality. The key is to be ready as a church when God blesses us with growth as the Lord leads us in fulfilling Bethany's Vision and Mission. We need to shift our mentality from a 'few key players' to a 'every member ministry' mentality. Acknowledging every member plays an important role as part of church body. We learned 3 applications from the advice of Jethro to Moses as the Ministry grow (Exod.18:19-22): i) The leaders' priority is to represent the needs of the people to the living God; ii) Communicate and instruct the people in the truth of God, teach them the way in which they are to walk, and the work they are to do; iii) Delegate to able and trusted people to share His ministry. We also learned 3 principles from Paul's letter, Eph. 4:11-16; a) There are sufficient gifts given to His entire body, not just to the pastor, to sustain any size church; b) when the gifts are exercised, the congregations grow up (members of the church become mature); c) maximum involvement of everyone leads to healthy growth (causes the growth and building up of the body). History shows that our Lord used both the Metropolitan and Neighbor mentality churches for His glory. And the above principles are applicable for both types of mentality. To be ready for growth, we need to be flexible with changes in our approach, that leads us to today's subject – on 'changing methods doesn't mean a changing message'.

Not many people are receptive to changes. We come across many people who long for 'the good old days', with no energy crisis, clean air, clear rivers and stream, close families, fun at school, in summary the simple life... And if we turned to the newspaper today, we read of a hectic lifestyle, high-pressured politics, too much crimes and too much violence, the tendency is to sigh and wish for the days in the past. But are those days really all that good? Especially if we recalled the world wars, the poor medical conditions, the days when we need to start a car with a crane, when travels took long and unreliable days by ship across oceans, when homes were without sewerage system, etc. etc., we then realized everything depends on one's perspective. Some look back and remember only the best of times –the easier pace, closer ties and the more honest relationship. Others see the inconveniences, the obsolescence and the inefficiency. When we stop long enough to think objectively, we realize that no time is ideal, making it necessary for us to adapt and adjust with time.

How Times Change

Dan. 2:20-21, reminds us that our God is in control. All changes that impact every generation is under His full control. He is the one who removes kings and establishes kingdoms. He gives wisdom, knowledge and understanding to all men. He is in charge of all times and of all seasons. Everything from modern inventions to global changes, our faithful God is in control. If we truly believe God is sovereign, then we cannot believe that He is ever out of date. No matter how rapid is the population explosion, how advance is the knowledge and technology, God is in charge and understands nuclear energy, the microchip and the rocket science. In light of all these remarkable changes with time, we need to ask ourselves the question why does church remain captivated to yesterday? As God's people we should embrace God as the Creator and Source of all knowledge and invention, and see changes as friends rather than resist them as enemies.

Note some of the advantages in today's technology in the advancement of God's kingdom. With the aid of computer, we can today complete the translation of a book in the New Testament into a new language within months, compared to decades in the past. We can now travel easily across oceans in hours, instead of weeks. An evangelist can now stand before a camera, with the help of satellite, can be seen all around the world in split seconds. As a church, we should not be threatened by the changes of our times; instead we should monitor and evaluate our methods. That means it can be altered or discarded, replaced by a better and more efficient method. Methods must continually be evaluated and, when necessary, changed, even in churches.

But Some Things Will Never Change

This does not imply that everything can be changed. In Ps 11:1-3, David reminds us that foundation cannot be changed. In facing the close pursue of King Saul, David feared for his life and declared that in God he takes refuge and comfort hiding in his relationship with God. David knows he is not safe and cannot hide from his enemies even after darkness fall, if he the Lord is not with him. He asked the Lord, what can the righteous do if everything is up for grabs? What do we do if everything changes so much so that even God, our foundation, change? What can the righteous do then?

Paul in his letter to Timothy, when he was in the prison and about to say goodbye to life and Timothy was taking up the touch in carry on as a Pastor in Ephesus, in 2 Tim 2:14-19, instructed Timothy to remind his congregation of the unchanging (timeless) truth of God. Urging Timothy not to 'quarrel about words, which is of no value' (vs. 14), basically to major on the majors, not on the minors – to stay on the essential issues that are worth his time and effort. 'Do your best ... to correctly handle the word of truth' (v.15). The Bible is not a Book of sermons, but a Book of truth. Teach our flock the unchangeable truths of the Scripture. 'Avoid godless chattering and straying from the truth of Scripture, influencing others to ungodly ways' (vv. 16-18). Vs. 19 testified that the firm foundation of God will stand. There will be earthquake, but there will be no truthquake. God's truth stands firm like a great rock, and nothing can shake it. The Scripture said in this verse that there are two seals, together proving His truth will never be shaken – one is invisible and the other visible. The 'invisible' seal is God's promise that what has been written in the Scripture will remain unchanged, securely sealed and absolutely safe. The other guarantee is 'visible', the evidence of the lifestyles of God's people, the righteous ones. They may be only a remnant, but the righteous are there in every generation. The point is clear – Our styles and methods must be kept up to date, but the truth is timeless, not subject to change. **We are to leave the familiar without disturbing the essentials.** Serving the present age need not to exclude doing our Master's will.

If there are modern inventions that will help us get the truth out more powerfully, more quickly, and more effectively, we should not hesitate in using them, if they don't compromise our theology and contaminate our message. At the same time, we should not just embrace something simply because it is new, thinking that which is modern and futuristic is safe because it is in the hands farsighted people. We need to keep two thoughts in our mind to stay flexible and effective in our approach while remaining godly and pure in our lifestyle. Firstly, it is very important for us to continue hearing what God says as we adjust our lives to the time in which we live, that is we need to know God and the Scripture well. Secondly, we need to keep believing what God says more than any other voice in the future.

Again Paul warned Timothy in 2 Tim. 3:1-5, 'in the last days, difficult times will come. Men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, ... haters of goods, ... lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God. That is why God's unchanging message of love and forgiveness is important and must not be altered. Modern futuristic humanity will still suffer the effects of the same diseases – total depravity. Nobody is better equipped to handle the responsibilities of the future other than informed, alert Christian. None of our futuristic and sophisticated stuff will surprise God; He understands all and remains in full control. What we can be sure as revealed in the Scripture (2Tim 3:13) is that the future will proceed from bad to worse, there will be an increasing number of evils and deceivers.

The Major Ingredient For Survival

We will need to pray for discernment to keep the proper balance between staying with our time and standing firm in God's truth. We will need discernment to act as a watchdog to keep us from getting lost in the midst of tomorrow's depravity and deception, even as we keep space with its advancement. Webster defines discernment as "the power to see what is not evident to the average mind, especially in reading character

and motive.” The church that sits around frowning at the future will become a church lacking in relevance and excitement. At the same time, the church that softens its stand theologically and alters Scripture to fit the future’s style will lose its power. We must be willing to leave the familiar without disturbing the essentials.

Two Suggestions for Keeping Our Balance

First, changing times require the willingness to retool and flex when needed. We may have a certain style of ministry that has worked well in the past, for many years, but may need rethinking with changes in time, and even with what God is working in our church. Will it compromise Scripture to alter our style? Probably not. How willing are we to flex? How open are we to changes? Growth required innovative thinking. Churches have to retool and flex.

Second, changeless truths require the discipline to resist and fight when necessary. No amount of futuristic technology or modernistic advancement gives us the right to deny God’s Book or alter its truths. The Scripture gives us our standards. That’s a given. The truths of God, our foundation, cannot be changed.

Our security and hope should not be going back to the “good old days” or shrink from the “bad new days”. But by the grace and mercy of God, as we stay open to the need to change and flex, without distorting the essentials, we won’t simply survive, we will triumph.