

Change Agents in the Church Today

“For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us”
(Acts 6:14).

It All Began with a Change

The process of salvation is a process of change. God expects a change in our actions and attitude (called repentance).

“And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent” (Acts 17:30).

When we obey the plan of salvation, God changes us by forgiving us, washing away our sins, and filling us with the Holy Spirit.

“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Our Christian experience begins with change. It will also end with change. Don't you think that there ought to be some changes along the way, too?

“Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself” (Philippians 3:21).

Wanted: Change Agents




One of the church's most critical needs is for a new breed of leaders. In order for the church to advance, we, as leaders, must first advance. Before we can expect others to grow, we must first grow. Howard Hendricks said, “If you want to continue leading, you must continue changing.”

It has been said that during times of “no change,” mere management, maintenance and tradition keep organizational wheels winding. In times of “change” strong, creative (new ideas) and innovative (putting new ideas to use) leadership are required. As we progress we need to be careful. Yesterday's advances have a way of becoming tomorrow's traditions. The creative ideas someone had five or ten years ago can easily become church traditions. People tend to hold on to the comfortable past. Effective leaders need to be open to new ideas.

Change agents produce innovative ideas that will encourage change, and they do their best to motivate others to accept these changes. This requires a loving, patient attitude and open communication.

Change in the Book of Acts

The Book of Acts is a book of change.

-  Pentecost brought changes so drastic that people asked, “What meaneth this?” (Acts 2:12).
-  Lives were changed through water baptism in Jesus' name and the baptism of the Holy Spirit.
-  Worship places changed as believers began meeting from house to house.

- 📖 New methods of giving were established as members sold all of their possessions and brought the money to the church.
- 📖 Persecution brought change as believers were scattered everywhere.
- 📖 A new mindset was needed to accommodate the Gentile believers (considered untouchables to the Jews).
- 📖 The Jerusalem Council brought about changes in the expectations placed on believers.
- 📖 Great men, like Saul of Tarsus, were drastically changed. Saul (Paul) ultimately was used as a change agent to begin the missionary movement.

In Acts 6 the leaders could not continue the apostolic ministry because they were busy waiting on tables. They had to adjust their priorities. Even today preachers are performing many functions that could be easily handled by the membership and local leaders.

Peter admonished the crowd assembled on the Day of Pentecost to "save yourselves from this untoward generation" (Acts 2:40). He referred to a generation that was spinning round and round on the wheel of traditions.

The early apostles often challenged the status quo (the normal way people did things). They turned the world upside down (Acts 17:6). They introduced a new way; "saying that there is another king, one Jesus" (Acts 17:7). They were accused of preaching Jesus, one who would change their customs.

"For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us" (Acts 6:14).

Jesus, the God that Changes yet Never Changes

We need to be agents of change. We preach a gospel that is a life-changing message. Jesus taught His disciples to be agents of change (Matthew 23:1-36, 5:21-44).

In Matthew 5, Jesus was on a mountain giving the "be-attitudes" to His people. He mentioned several times, "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time" (Matthew 5:21). He followed this each time with, "But I say unto you" (Matthew 5:22). He was trying to change traditional thought. However, many opted to hold onto tradition.

"And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition. Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye" (Mark 7:9, 13).

Some Things Never Change

It is imperative that we hold to the old paths when it comes to doctrine.

"Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein" (Jeremiah 6:16).

"Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you, to me indeed is

Change

not grievous, but for you it is safe" (Philippians 3:1).

"I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed" (Galatians 6:6, 8-9).

We must continue to preach the "same" gospel and uphold biblical teachings and principles. However, methods should change to match changing times. The world around us is constantly changing. We serve an unchanging God in an ever-changing world.

"Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever" (Hebrews 13:8). (He never changes; we do!)

"For I am the LORD, I change not" (Malachi 3:6).

Jesus challenged the traditionalists of His day, called Pharisees. They held to the old ways and refused to tolerate the changes Jesus advocated. Jesus was constantly opposed because He advocated change. He wanted a change of thinking, a change of heart, and a change of lifestyle. One of the greatest enemies to the church today may not come from outside. It may be "traditionalism," insistence on doing things the same way that they were done years ago. This brings a sense of security, often called a "comfort zone." If the way things are done works, keep it. If it does not work best, let us be bold enough to change.

"If you always do what you have always done, you will always get what you have always gotten."

It is easy to recognize traditionalism in others, but seeing it in ourselves is more difficult.

We need to continue to walk in the old paths of doctrine and godly living. In other areas we need to dig out new paths of creative change. The old ways often do not fit the new circumstances. It has been said, "No condition is permanent." Conditions change. New options must be examined and risk taken. Even in the physical body all that grows—changes. (The body moves through the process of aging.)

As leaders, we need to establish a sense of urgency for change. We must motivate others to see the need. Focusing on the potential gain from change does this. We must be able to answer, "Why is this better?"

Recruiting More Change Agents

In changing times there needs to be a renewed emphasis on the ministry of the body. Members should be taking their places of responsibility within the body.


"If the tradition of a particular society is such that there is no room for people to exercise their gifts, then let our traditions be shattered to pieces! Let us look at other structures that will make it possible for God's people to use their gifts. If our traditions mean that one person is needed to drive the bus, and everyone else is a passenger behind, let us remember that the church is compared to a body, not a bus.


Change


There is not just one driver with all the others sitting comfortably behind occasionally patting the driver on the back to assure him he is doing a good job and that he should carry on. What are we doing to make sure that members—ordinary members—have discovered their gifts and that a way has been made for them to exercise those gifts for the profit of all?" (*Wanted: Servant Leaders*) This quote is referring to membership becoming involved in the "body ministry."


Change Agents in Older Organizations


Being a change agent in a well-established ministry or organization is not easy. Editor Randall Roberts in the book, *From Lessons in Leadership: Fitly Respected* mentions several points in how to be a change agent in a well-established ministry.


-  **Always preserve the reputation of the past.** Frequently praise and never criticize past leaders. The foundation that they have laid is the heritage that the present leader enjoys. If former leaders are still living, keep them informed of progress. Give them special attention.


-  **Move slowly.** It takes ten years to make major changes in older organizations. Don't make major changes the first year. Get to know the people and the history of the organization.


-  **Seek wide support for change.** Try to get everyone's support for change. Get everyone moving in the same direction.

-  **Change is painful.** Be ready for the pain. It is not easy to bring about change.

-  **Give away your best ideas.** Allow other people to claim your ideas as their own. Plant seeds in every meeting.

-  **Challenge, encourage, and empower everyone that you work with.** Never be satisfied with low quality, but seek for excellence.

-  **Prepare some change agents to come after you.** Mentor those that will be the next generation of change agents.

-  **Look back.** You need to know how far you have come so that you will understand how far you have to go. (These points adapted from the e-mail newsletter entitled "Ministry Tips —Reinvigorate Your Ministry".)

Study Questions

1. Explain how the Christian experience begins and ends with change.

2. What is one of the most critically needed resources in the church today?

3. What type of ideas is needed during a time of organizational change?

4. Briefly explain the kind of changes that Pentecost brought.

5. What is meant by the phrase "status quo"?

6. According to Acts 6:14, what did Jesus want to change?

7. What should never change (as related to the Word of God)?

8. What is one of the greatest enemies of the church today?

9. What does "traditionalism" mean?

10. How can leaders motivate others to see the need for change?
