

No Growth Without Change

From a letter written to U.S. President Martin Van Buren, dated January 31, 1829 ... The canal system of this country is being threatened by the spread of a new form of transportation known as "railroads." The federal government must preserve the canals for the following reasons: One. If canal boats are supplanted by "railroads," serious unemployment will result. Captains, cooks, drivers, hostlers, repairmen and lock tenders will be left without means of livelihood, not to mention the numerous farmers now employed in growing hay for horses. Two. Boat builders would suffer and towline, whip and harness makers would be left destitute. Three. Canal boats are absolutely essential to the defense of the United States. In the event of the expected trouble with England, the Erie Canal would be the only means by which we could ever move the supplies so vital to waging modern war. As you may well know, Mr. President, "railroad" carriages are pulled at the enormous speed of 15 miles per hour by "engines" which, in addition to endangering life and limb of passengers, roar and snort their way through the countryside, setting fire to crops, scaring the livestock, and frightening women and children. The Almighty certainly never intended that people should travel at such breakneck speed. – signed, Martin Van Buren, Governor of New York (from a book by Hans Finzel, who typed the chapter containing this anecdote on his laptop computer while in a plane traveling 475 miles per hour at an altitude of 34,000 feet)

By nature, human beings resist change. People are quick to criticize innovations, because the necessary changes frighten them. Once people said that cars would never replace the horse and carriage. Others said that the light bulb wasn't any better than the kerosene lamp. Some said that movies could never entertain like vaudeville could. Others declared that television would never replace radio as the primary source of entertainment. When Alexander Graham Bell invented an instrument called the telephone, which enabled people to talk through a wire over great distances, he was almost laughed out of town!

The Swiss watch industry made 85% of all the watches sold in the world in the mid 1970's. But by the mid 1980's they had laid off 25,000 watchmakers and were down to only 15% of the world market. A simple new development called the quartz movement, invented by a Swiss watchmaker but rejected by his superiors, redefined what the world expects of watches. The old watchmakers didn't think the quartz was really a watch, because it had no spring and winding knob. The world changed, they remained the same, upstarts like Seiko of Japan came along, and the rest is history.

In all of economic history, there is no technology that has grown faster than the World Wide Web. In 1969 only four primitive Web sites existed in the entire world. In 1990 there were 333,000. By the end of 1997 there were almost 20 million. It took 40 years for radio to reach 50 million domestic users; it took 14 years for television to do that; and for the Internet, only 4 years!

If your local store stocks a computer, it's obsolete. They can't yet order the current models!

The digital watch you now wear on your wrist contains more computing power than existed in the entire world before 1961. That birthday card with a 10-second message prerecorded by your kids contains more processing power than all the vacuum tube computers in 1950. Your car has more computational power to get it down the street than all the computers combined in the Apollo 11 spacecraft that carried Neal Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin to the moon. We are now living in a world where it is cheaper and faster to send a signal over 20,000 miles up to a satellite and back to a vibrating pager than it is to have someone walk 50 feet to tell you your table is ready.

The Arabic cultures of the world are in many ways fairly primitive, unchanged for thousands of years. In fact, the closest thing Islam has to our Western notion of "heresy" is the Arabic word for "innovation." They hate change! And they are not alone in thinking any change is heresy!

The early Christians were opposed to the change from communicating the gospel orally to writing it down! We would not have had a Bible if someone had not changed their methods!

Obviously, we live in a changing world. But some changes are good and some are bad. As far as the Apostolic church is concerned, the slightest change in MESSAGE would be absolutely fatal. However, even the early church wrestled with the issue of changing METHODS (Jew to Gentile).

2 Peter 3:14-18 *14 Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless. 15 And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; 16 As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction. 17 Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness. 18 But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen.*

Notice that Peter is warning the saints about false teachers twisting the Scripture to tamper with the MESSAGE of Paul. But he also exhorts them to continue to grow. Any long-term growth must be accompanied by changes in METHOD (i.e. deacons appointed in Acts 6).

The church that refuses to occasionally evaluate and change its METHODS is not protecting its message, but hiding its message behind obsolete traditions.

The human body is an incredible mechanism built by the Almighty, and like all of his creations it must change constantly to stay alive. In fact, in the medical world, a clinical definition of death is a body that does not change. Change is life. Stagnation is death. If you don't change, you die!

Psalm 139:14 I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and *that* my soul knoweth right well.

Ecclesiastes 11:5 As thou knowest not what *is* the way of the spirit, *nor* how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child: even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all.

Even at the cellular level, our bodies have incredible things to teach us about the church body!

Ephesians 4:11-16 ¹¹ And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; ¹² For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: ¹³ Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: ¹⁴ That we *henceforth* be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, *and* cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; ¹⁵ But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, *even* Christ: ¹⁶ From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

Hebrews 6:1-3 ¹ Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, ² Of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. ³ And this will we do, if God permit.

Growth is the "name of the game" in the church – and growth is, by its very definition, CHANGE.

In the time it takes for me to preach this sermon, hundreds of millions of the 100 trillion cells that make up your body will have died. Your body, with five pounds of dead cells already sticking to it, will have flaked them off or flushed them out.

Why are we not then shrinking with that kind of cellular change? Because for every one of those cells that dies, another cell divides to replace it with a new one. Skin replaces itself every month; the stomach lining, every five days; the liver, every six weeks; the skeleton, every three months; cheek cells, three times a day. Ninety-nine percent of the atoms in your body are replaced every year; the whole body every five years for men or every seven years for women.

Biologists are only now beginning to study this cell death phenomenon, asking why there is a "death wish" in every cell. Even at the cellular level, the body has a kind of collective awareness. Every cell contains within itself poison-pill proteins that are ready to be released. The body triggers these poison pellets for certain reasons:

SCULPTURE. Cells sculpt body parts. Our hands and feet are originally web-like structures. Our fingers and toes take shape in the womb only as the cells between them die. Our bodies would die before birth without cell death.

OBSOLESCENCE. When a cell is no longer contributing to the larger body, it knows it is no longer needed. Our bodies have been programmed so that when a cell is obsolete or obstinate or offensive, it dies.

SELF-SACRIFICE. Cells sacrifice themselves to protect the larger organism. If a cell is invaded by a deadly virus, it will trigger its own self-destruct mechanism called apoptosis, preventing the virus from spreading further.

ISOLATION. When neighboring cells exercise the ban on a cell; when the cells neighbors do not affirm it and encourage it and tell it how much it is needed, it dies. Only when it is connected and contributing to its partners do its apoptosis inhibitors kick in.

Your body is alive only because it is constantly changing, and because those parts that can't keep up and contribute to the whole are constantly dying. Death and changelessness go together. Life and change go together!

Bumper stickers: "Change is good. Unless it happens." "Change is good. You go first."
The post office received a returned letter marked "He's dead." When they inadvertently sent it out again to the same address, it came back again marked "He's still dead."

English poet Samuel Rogers: "It does not much matter whom one marries as one is sure to find the next morning it is someone else."

To grow, have revival, and do the will of God, our local church may occasionally have to change its METHODS. However, you can be assured that we will never change our MESSAGE.

To change a method doesn't mean eliminating the old, but rather incorporating the old within the new. Notice that Israel did two contrasting things when they left Egypt: Moses took with him the bones of Joseph (Exodus 13:19). Those bones were the symbol of the Hebrews' history, prompting them in their struggle to remember, equipping them in their war against forgetting.

But Israel also plundered the Egyptians (Exodus 3:21) when they left – they used the inventions of the Egyptians to do the will of God in their own nation.

We need to do what Ezekiel did (Ezekiel 37) – we need to make those old bones live! Use every bit of modern technology and method, but keep ourselves tied to our heritage, making it come alive!

John 4:10 Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water.

John 7:38 He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.

Jesus used the analogy of "living water" when He talked to the Samaritan woman to describe the gospel. Water fills any receptacle without retaining the form of any. The container doesn't matter. Content stays the same, containers change.

WATER ILLUSTRATION

Jesus told us WHAT we should be doing. "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." (Mark 16:15) He didn't say HOW we should be doing it. The method changes!