

A BIBLICALLY FUNCTIONING CHURCH A Flexible Organization

(Available on CD)

Thus far, in our series on A Biblically Functioning Church, we've considered – what the purpose for a church is; what the qualifications are for Elders & Deacons to oversee and direct a church; why a gift-oriented church helps a church grow and why a passionate pursuit for a deeper relationship with Jesus is what should follow becoming a new creature in Christ.

The Old Testament says a great deal about new things. We read of a “new song” (Psalm 40:3), “new heart” and “new Spirit” (Ezekiel 11:19), “new heavens and a new earth” (Isaiah 65:17) and much more.

The New Testament also mentions new things: “new commandment” (John 13:34), “new self” (Ephesians 4:24), “new covenant” (Matthew 26:28), “new birth” (1 Peter 1:3), “new creation” (2 Corinthians 5:17), “the new and living way” (Hebrews 10:20) and “new name” (Revelation 2:17), etc.

*Biblical Teaching Made Relevant in Today's World
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I. Wineskins

Jesus told a parable about old and new things. In Luke 5:37-38 (also Matthew 9:14-17), we have our key text for today. This parable is definitely not under-stood by church people the world-over. It is however understood by the business world. I say this because if Christians did, they would not resist change so strongly. They would be flexible and adaptable to societal changes while still maintaining the unchangeable Good News preached by Jesus, his disciples and the early Christians.

Jesus' words in Luke 5:37-38, “no one pours new wine into old wineskins ...” “No, new wine must be poured into new wineskins.” In these verses, Jesus distinguishes between something essential and primary (wine) and something secondary but also necessary and useful (wineskins). Jesus knew where the real problem was with the Scribes and Pharisees. They were irritated because Jesus was not obeying all their traditions. (Matthew 9:14)

Luke's account of this parable (an earthly story with a heavenly meaning) teaches us several things. First, the Gospel (wine) is applicable to each genera-tion because, “There is no other name under heaven whereby we can be saved.”

Secondly, church structures (wineskins) are not eternal, they must always be made new and replaced when no longer useful.

The Gospel itself demands and produces change. New approaches for reaching people with the life-changing news of God's love must continually be explored if a church is to reach the next generation.

Luke 5:39 reveals a little bit of sarcasm on Jesus' part when he said, “The old is better.” Jesus was challenging those who were saying, “We never did it that way before.” The old Judaism could not contain the new wine of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, nor did its leaders want it too!

The problem with wineskins (church structures) is they challenge us to think about change, and only some people like change. But, if men and women are lost and going to hell for eternity, and “we will give an account”, we must always be open to new things.

Harold Snyder – the author of *The Problem of Wine Skins* says church build-ings witness to:

1. Our immobility
2. Our inflexibility
3. Our pride
4. Our class divisions

If Harold Snyder's observations are correct, we must always be asking, "What new approaches to ministry can we try in order to effectively spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ?"

II. Empowering Church Leadership

Flexibility is seen in the house churches started by the apostle Paul. The emphasis was on meeting the needs of people, and that was to be accomplished by the oversight of biblically qualified Elders, to preach the Good News of God's love and forgiveness, to meet their physical and emotional needs, and male and female Deacons to run the necessary programs.

Throughout the New Testament, we see a group (plurality) of Elders appointed to oversee each local church. Elders lead the church, teach and preach, protect the church from false teachers, exhort and admonish believers, visit, delegate and pray.

The only other God-ordained position of leadership for a church is the Deacon. Deacon: from the Greek diakonos, "servant" and Diakoneo, "to serve." The record of the first Deacons in the early Church is found in Acts 6:1-6. Deacons are men and women called to perform certain functional tasks in a church. A Deacon is a servant leadership position. A Deacon is not an overseer, nor is he or she required to teach and defend the faith. Deacons are leaders called to accomplish specific tasks.

No one individual can fulfill the many needs of a congregation. It takes more than dedication to lead a church; it takes Holy Spirit-called and qualified Elders and Deacons to make it grow and a congregation to trust and accept the God-called Elders and Deacons to lead the church!

III. A Flexible Organization

A church which truly wants to reach-out to the spiritually lost and continue to grow numerically must face change. But, factors which inhibit change in many churches are many. Two primary reasons must be dealt with before other inhibitors are also removed. The first is a return to an emphasis on people not programs.

The second is an awareness and acknowledgment that a desire for permanence in a church is counterproductive because the longer a congregation exists, the more it slows down due to internal issues unless change is continually stressed.

A flexible church led by Elders and Deacons must be constantly looking at what other creative churches are doing and what research indicates in order to effectively reach those spiritually seeking answers to life's questions.

I recently finished reading a book entitled, *Simple Church*. The point of the book, based on research of churches which are growing and those which are not, is – excuse the pun, "simple." Simple church structures have a clear process as to how to bring believers along in the faith, knowledge and service of Jesus Christ. "Simple churches" are exciting churches to be part of and succeed in equipping believers to live lives pleasing to Jesus.

SUMMARY AND APPLICATION FOR OUR LIVES

Our culture has cultivated a new appetite for the simple Good News of Jesus. This generation of non-traditional thinkers want and expect church to be simple, not complex. Just Jesus! Not Christianity with all its trappings, just good music, expository preaching from the Bible and a place to belong.

Charles Swindoll wrote an article entitled, *Externals and Internals*. In it he wrote, "And what about you? Busy protecting and trying to preserve the wineskins? Working overtime carrying a torch of external tradition? Hey, I understand. I did that for almost 20 years ... [However] The older I get, the less I care about the traditional skins and the more I crave pure wine, the essentials ... [For helping me understand the problem of wineskins.]"

"How flexible are you when it comes to church and reaching out to the spiritually lost? When it comes to externals and internals, how flexible are you?"

Amen