

SCRIPTURAL PRINCIPLES FOR TIMES OF CHALLENGE & CHANGE

Change is an essential ingredient of life!

How we deal with it is the important factor!

We need to be open to expedient change in our personal life, but it should be approached with wisdom and caution.

We need to be open to expedient change in the church, but it should be approached with wisdom and caution.

1. We are living in a time of great change. Toffler used the word **TRANSCIENCE** to describe our time as he said no other word really depicts our state of flux (Future Shock).

2. Change is common to all of us, and it is an important concomitant of life. We personally are in a continuous state of change physically, although we do not like to admit it.

3. The ability of people to change varies from person to person, and even for the same person, it varies from situation to situation.

4. Change is challenging....it always requires something of us. The dynamics of change involve **SEPARATION, TRANSITION, and REUNION. SEPARATION** in the sense that the person is now divorcing from a previous pattern (usually because former ways are proving no longer adequate); **TRANSITION** in the sense that there follows a period of floating (sometimes characterized by disorientation and fearfulness); and then, as adjustments are made and new learning occurs, **REUNION** completes the process as the new situation fits into the background and experience of the individual.

SOME GENERAL PRINCIPLES RELATED TO CHANGE

1. We feel more comfortable with things the way we have been used to them. In addition, individual tolerance for change varies depending on self-esteem, past success in negotiating positive change, a life time of impressions about change beginning with what we have learned from our parents, conviction as to the need of change, and the degree to which one has a firm unchanging place on which to stand. Or stated differently, change is related to a person's general sense of security.

2. Tolerance for change is not necessarily age-related. Some young persons may be more resistant to change than are some older persons. However, as we grow older, many of us may become less inclined to change. It is easy for us to think the past was better (which Solomon says is not wise...Eccl. 7:10).
3. If ones sense of security and personal identity are related to something that is changing, change will be resisted more.
4. As Toffler states in Future Shock, change is hard to deal with when it comes too quickly, unexpectedly, or in too great volume.
5. To some degree, tolerance to change is related to confidence in the persons or institutions initiating change.
6. Tolerance to change is related to the assessed value of the area in which change is to occur. Change is more easily accepted in areas of life that are considered less personal. Change is usually more easily tolerated in technology than it is in ideology. In fact, changes in world culture often come first in technological areas.
7. Tolerance to change is negative when the particular change renders obsolete ones learning or ability to function.
8. One who is healthy and rested will usually relate to change better than one who is ill, fatigued or under stress.
9. Reaction to change is positive when the change is seen as beneficial to the goals or aspirations of the individual, or the group.
10. Since a lot of change we see in our culture seems to be in a negative direction, and having seen defections from Truth in changes that have occurred in some denominations, it is easy to be fearful of change in the church.
11. As a general rule, change should be undertaken when it offers some advantage for our purposes as a church, and not just for the sake of change.

THERE ARE TWO GREAT AREAS OF POSITIVE CHANGE

1. The first is change which is promoted by Scripture and is either part of a corrective process, or is intrinsic to growth or progress in the Faith (Heb. 6:1-3).

2. The second is change which is a matter of choice and which may appear to be expedient. In this case, care must be taken not to carelessly override the scruples of others. At the same time, it must be noted that the Scriptures which warn against using our areas of liberty in ways that cause others to sin by violating their conscience, or to fall away, were not intended to be used as a threat by brethren who are not about to fall away, but just have a different opinion. Such an effort to manipulate or to control a church is unbiblical.

METHODS OF RESPONSE TO CHANGE

1. One psychologist, Karen Horney, in her book "Our Inner Conflicts" (chapters 3,4,5), speaks of characteristic personality types as being "movers away," "movers against," and "movers toward." "Movers away" tend to quit, or to flee situations or persons that may be threatening, or may demand too much of them. "Movers against" tend to fight, to create upheaval, and to resist persons, situations or conditions which are interpreted negatively. "Movers toward" tend to assimilate, affect understanding or compromise, and adjust to persons or conditions they encounter.

GENERAL TRUTHS ABOUT CHANGE

1. In deciding to resist all change, we must be careful not to raise our traditions to the level of sacred truth (Matt. 15: 1-14).

2. Lest we think we have no traditions in churches of Christ, it must be admitted that some of what we practice is a result of decisions we have made that could have been made differently (times of meetings, ordering of the worship, committee structures, church buildings, type of songs sung, building furniture and arrangement, Sunday School, etc.).

3. Change usually takes extensive preparation. Persons who do not take the necessary time to prepare for change, or who demand change whose dimensions exceed the readiness of a group, may become antibodies to change.

SCRIPTURES THAT WILL HELP GUIDE US WHEN WE CHANGE

1. Romans 14. a) Do not let matters of opinion become divisive (v. 1); b) If you think a brother or sister has some strange opinions, keep in mind that God is their final judge (vs. 10, 13); c) Those who walk in love are careful not to use their freedom (based on superior knowledge) in a manner that would harm a fellow believer (vs. 13, 15); d) Mature Christians work for peace and to build each other up spiritually (v. 19).

2. 1 Corinthians 10. a) Freedom to change is limited by what is expedient, and by what edifies (v. 23); b) Love demands that we seek to do what is good for our neighbor and avoid what would harm him/her (vs. 24, 32-33); c) It is important that we be sensitive to the scruples of others (vs. 28-29).

3. 1 Corinthians 11. a) Problems (even division) which come from change are merited if it is a matter of standing up for what Scripture teaches (vs. 18-19).

4. 1 Corinthians 12, 13, 14. a) Change should be avoided which, (1) so promotes the gifts or abilities of some members that it leads to pride on their part, and to a feeling of being less important or less needed on the part of others (12:14-25), (2) is a procedural rather than a Scriptural change and threatens to cause a division in the Body (12:25), (3) does not reflect the love which is patient, kind, not jealous, not arrogant, does not act improperly, is not self-serving, is not anger prone, does not keep score of wrongs, rejoices in the truth, bears, believes, endures and hopes all things, and never quits (13:4-8), (4) does not promote things which edify (teach, instruct, build up, encourage) (12:7, 14:3, 5, 12, 26), (5) promotes things which cause disorder or confusion (14:23, 33, 40).

Carl Mitchell