

“New Wine in Old Wineskins – Building the Church of Jesus Christ”

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April 20, 2008

“No one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost and the skins as well; but one puts new wine into fresh wineskins.”

Read Mark 2:18-22

As a pastor of a long standing fellowship (50 plus years), I find this thought, “New Wine in Old Wineskins,” a persistent tension in today’s church. In failing to differentiate between the message of the gospel and the manner in which it is celebrated, we have generational divide and church families that are only one age and thus one dimensional. This is not the Church Jesus builds. Churches are to be generationally diverse and, if community dictates, ethnically varied. No one would ever think of having a church of only men or only women or only children. This would be unwise and foolish.

Any church that targets, and or has, only one thing will become stagnant and predictable. Such a church is either dying or dead. How can we keep a generationally diverse fellowship and still celebrate the gospel of Jesus Christ? It has been a grievous thing to see the young and the old leave the church because of change or non-change. Either the change is too fast or the church is not changing fast enough. Either way everyone loses. The gospel is not changing, but the manner in which it is celebrated must change and that change might happen every twenty years.

I am in danger of making application where none is to be found, but I find its urgency too direct that it would appear negligent if I did not draw parallels to our current church scene.

You cannot retain the old with the new without doing damage to both. And what Jesus is saying is that the new expression of Kingdom truth will not fit into the old imagery of Kingdom thinking. We do a disservice to the truth when we try and make it fit into a mold that is old. Every church must disciple the next generation and what must be maintained is the gospel’s purity. The *context* in which it is proclaimed, and the manner in which it is proclaimed is going to change with each successive generation. For the purpose of this reading, I am defining a generation as twenty years older or younger. The gospel message entrusted to me must not be altered (2 Tim. 2:2). The gospel is a non-negotiable. The manner in which the gospel is celebrated is negotiable, and the manner in which it is celebrated will change with every generation.

For example, preaching means “to herald, to proclaim.” Historically this looks like a person standing in front of a congregation and “preaching.” Typically he wears a coat

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and tie and has a conservative haircut. What that pastor looks like is going to change. There is nothing sacred about the dress of the pastor. This generation of those in their twenties and thirties has ipods, YouTube, search engines, e-books, and phones that take pictures and pick up the internet in coffee cafes that have wireless internet. That generation looks different than their parents and grandparents. Friends, all of these things must be used to proclaim Christ and His redemptive work. We cannot and we must not force the new truth of Christ onto old forms. Jesus is bigger than this.

The church I pastor is not being built for me, but for my children and grandchildren. The manner in which I worship and serve is going to be controlled by my children and grandchildren. My responsibility is to be a mentor of biblical truth. I am to guard the truth, not my preferences or what makes me comfortable or what is convenient.

In light of this, I would like to make an application of this passage to any local church's discipleship ministry. This is the part of wisdom. **First**, in teaching our people we must always reach down to the next generation. It cannot be only to peers. It must reach 20 years down. It must be to our children and grandchildren. **Second**, we must separate the message from the method or manner in which the message is placed. We must contextualize the message. The message cannot change, but what it looks like culturally must be fluid based on the people we are reaching. **Finally**, if we have done this well, then the conflicts over theology and ideology will be minimal because those issues are stable. It is the *expression* of those truths that must be fluid and it will be the mentoring generation that bends to the next generation if the church is to continue in health.

“New wine must be poured into new wineskins,’ not accommodated to those comfortable things in our lives with which it is basically incompatible. The message for disciples is to be uncompromising about our faith and the work of the Spirit in our lives. If our honored customs and habits, and the structures of our society must adjust to that, then so be it.” http://www.jesuswalk.com/lessons/5_33-39.htm