

BIBLE STUDY BY MRS. LENA CARMICHAEL FRIDAY 17th SEPTEMBER, 1993.
AT CAMP CLAYTON FOR A.C.W.

A CHRISTIAN RESPONSE TO A CHANGING WORLD - CHRISTIANS OF ALL
PEOPLE SHOULD BE ABLE TO COPE WITH CHANGE.

(1)

RENEWED MINDS.

Christians, of all people, should be able to cope with change because our Christian lives should be one of change - changing more and more into Christ-likeness - changing our minds from mean negative jealous worldly minds to minds that are generous free, spiritual, rich, loving. Be transformed by having your minds renewed it says in Rom.12:2 - We are being changed from one degree of glory to another it says in 2 Cor. 3:18 : "We are all beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another".

We should be changing our minds and our behaviour to become more and more Christlike.

(2)

GOD HIMSELF IS THE ROCK UNDER US.

Christians, of all people, should be able to cope with change because behind us, beneath us, is something unutterably solid - God Himself. We don't have to cling to traditions for stability. We don't have to cling to the past for stability - we have God. When everything around us seems to be changing, God is the solid unchanging rock.

(3)

GOD MADE CHANGE.

Christians, above all people, should be able to cope with change because God made change, it's part of his plan. He made an earth where the weather changes from day to day and season to season. He made a world where glaciers and volcanoes and flooded rivers have changed the shape of the landscape of the landscape. He made a world where the movement of the geological plates have changed the position of continents. He made stars and planets that continually move, and change their place in space. He made a world where human beings change from babies to children to adults, and as they age the colour of their hair and the texture of their skin changes. He made people with minds capable of growing and maturing and changing. He made a world where mental choices can change the direction of our lives.

2.

Change is a part of the way God wanted things to be when he made this world. Christians, of all people, should be able to handle change because they know it's a part of His plan.

STABILITY.

But all change is a part of God's plan. And He didn't make a world that was all chaotically changing all the time. He made a world that has stability and predictability. We can know the patterns of the seasons. We can know the pattern of changes from childhood to adulthood. Humans seem to need stability, predictability, continuity.

I saw the program "Heartbeat" on TV on Sunday night. There's an old character George who's got an 18 year old niece coming to stay with him - He's worried about it. Someone says 'It'll be good for you George, stop you getting set in your ways'. And old George says 'I like being set in my ways. It's one of the comforts of old age'.

HOLMES TEST.

There's a test made up by a psychologist called Holmes, where he lists changes that often affect people, and to each change he gives a certain number of points. -

Death of a spouse 100 points; divorce 73 points;

retirement 45 points; pregnancy 40 points,

son or daughter leaving home 29 points,

change in residence 20 points, change in schools 20 points,

Christmas 12 points, and so on.

People whose score for one year adds up to 200 or more are quite likely to suffer psychological or physical illness in the next year, because human beings find it difficult to cope with too much change at once.

STABILITY FROM BIBLE AND PERSON OF GOD.

Christians suffer, just like anyone else does, from the stressful effects of change but they have three things that help stabilise their lives overall.

1. The Bible, God, Friends.

First The Bible, a stable, reliable set of rules to live by, values, beliefs.

Second, God Himself, a stable, reliable person to talk to and depend on, to receive love and encouragement from.

Third, if the Church is working properly, people can rely on the friendship of other Christians to strengthen and stabilise their lives. But I feel sad that in this busy world we don't give a lot of time to friendship, and I think many people feel fairly alone and miss out on that strength and stability that true friendship gives.

3.

FACTORS AFFECTING HOW WE HANDLE CHANGE.

Some people handle change better than others.

PERSONALITY.

Our personality affects the way we cope with change. Some people love change, enjoy it, feel enlivened by it, seek it eagerly - new work, new experiences, new places to live. Other people put a high value on security, and they feel secure when things remain as they are, or were. They resist change.

PERSONAL TASTE.

Personal taste affects how we accept change. I love a particular chorus, you hate it. That's just my taste against yours - nothing spiritual about that. Why should your taste dominate mine?

A lot of things we argue about in churches are just a matter of personal taste. You might resist a certain change because it's against your personal taste. I might push for it because it appeals to my personal taste. There's nothing spiritual in that. The spiritual issue is how we react to each other. When we see change, we see some bad reactions..

ATTITUDES.

When we see change, we see some nasty attitudes surfacing.

STUBBORNNESS. - people wanting to have it their way, no matter what, like my little kids, "Mum, Mum, I want to watch playschool and he keeps pushing "play" because he wants to see a video, make him stop". To stamp your foot and scream and get stubborn, because you can't have things your way is childish and immature, and doesn't look remotely Christian to me.

This is Christian : James 3, v.17, (Living Bible) :

But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure and full of quiet gentleness. Then it is peaceloving and courteous. It allows discussion and is willing to yield to others; it is full of mercy and good deeds. It is whole-hearted and straight forward and sincere.

In the middle there, it said "it allows discussion and is willing to yield to others."

When you see change, you see people wanting to lord it over others to rule, to force their way upon others.

One of Jesus' key teachings was servanthood. We're supposed to have the attitude of serving our fellow Christians, not lording it over them.

When you see change you see an us-against-them attitude. Us who want change against them that don't, or us who don't want change against them who do. God must cry!

4.

John chapter 17 is a very heart-rending sort of chapter. It's the prayer of Jesus just before he was betrayed. He pours out the last longings of his heart for his people. Three times he prays that they will be one, that they will be united.

Jesus wants us to all be on the same side. There isn't an us and a them in the church - we're all His, and when we have divided ourselves into us and them, we have done wrong. We have done wrong, we have grieved him. Jesus' dying wish for us was unity and oneness.

When you see change you'll see fear - fear of the unknown, fear of what the change will lead to, fear of losing something that was precious to us. When people fear they'll lose something precious they react in funny ways - unpleasant, ungracious ways sometimes. e.g. Mabel loves grand old hymns, choruses seem like a threat to her. Mabel fears she'll lose the chance to sing all those grand hymns. Some of them have pleasant memories associated with them - when she was a little girl they sang them in the country church where grandma was the organist, and the paddocks outside had a lovely smell after the hay had been cut, but choruses have no such memory attached, and she loves the grandeur of the old tunes and their familiarity. But Mabel doesn't know how to say all that, so she says "If they're going to sing choruses every week I'm not coming here any more!"

There must be better ways to handle change than that. There must be ways to be sensitive to what we're losing and what we're gaining when change comes.

Jesus said I am the Way, and he showed us the way of love, humility, servanthood, compassion, and he prayed for our unity. There are attitudes to apply to all of life, including the way we react to the people who are resisting a change we want, or bringing about change we don't like.

A TIME FRAME FOR CHANGE..

THERE ARE MOMENTS WHEN WE NEED TO REACT quickly to change.

This current budget, where the poor, with old cars, will have to pay more than the rich, for petrol, is unfair. Did the church react quickly to defend the poor? Well no, the church is not very good at reacting quickly to political and legislative change. But it is good at reacting quickly to calamities - floods and earthquakes, with aid, because we've got the structures that can respond quickly to social and political issues if necessary.

5.

There are other changes that take years or decades. Have you gradually matured over the past ten or twenty years? Has your character developed? Have your ideas expanded? Have you been able to nurture people with love. If you look for change overnight in these areas, you might be disappointed, because it can take years.

IS CHANGING YOUR MIND A CRIME?

e.g. DANCING - When I was young, some people taught me that dancing was wrong, and I believed them. But then I saw Cossacks dancing, and traditional national dances of all sorts, and movies of ballroom scenes from previous centuries, ladies gliding around in magnificent dresses. In the Bible I read that after they crossed the Red Sea, Miriam led the women of Israel and they danced a worship dance on the sand by the sea. In Samuel (2 Sam: 6-14) I read that David danced with joy and worship, So I had to change my mind and say, Now that I've seen more in life, and read more in the Bible, my understanding has changed. Some dancing may be immoral, but dancing is fun, or beautiful or even worshipful.

It's a trivial example, but the point is none of us have had perfect teaching. And so there will be times when ideas that we've held on to for years suddenly show up as being not quite right, inadequate. And we have to change our ideas a bit. Some people balk at this, think you should stick to what you were first taught. Yes, do, if it's right, but not if it's wrong, and not if it's only half the truth. God is truth. Seek the truth, and if that involves changing your mind, change it, Paul says in Romans that we should be transformed by the renewing of our minds. How renewed is your mind? Is God frequently at work in your mind cleansing it, enriching it, drawing it on to new understandings? By that he can transform your character - change you.

BIBLICAL EXAMPLES OF CHANGE.

We think we live in a changing society, and so we do, but that's nothing new. Think of the Israelites leaving Egypt with Moses. Slavery one day, freedom the next, then fleeing for their lives from the Egyptians, then safety, then the desert trek - where would the food and water come from? Fighting to take possession of the land, working for themselves, where they were used to being ordered about by the slave masters. The Ten Commandments and all

6.

the minor commandments - new rules to live by, the feast days and sacrifices - new religious observances. They went through a tremendous range of changes in forty to sixty years.

Think of the NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH. Radical changes had happened. Jesus had come alive again after he died. That was a radical change to the normal process of events. Then the disciples had preached salvation by faith in Jesus. That was radical. Up till now it had been salvation by keeping the Ten Commandments and a lot of little other commandments and a bit of faith.

Can you imagine if someone came up to you and said "All your life you have believed you are saved by faith in Christ, now I want to explain to you a different way to salvation. You would rebel. You can't change something as fundamental as how to be saved. No, you can't, but once it happened. They were brave believers, those first ones who let go of their old idea of salvation and accepted the new one.

The Gentiles got saved, barbarians, and God gave them the Holy Spirit when they weren't even circumcised, and didn't obey various other laws. That was a shock to many genuinely converted Jews. Some thought it couldn't be right, and travelled around telling the Gentiles to be circumcised and obey the laws. That caused confusion. So the church had its first council meeting, the Council of Jerusalem, Acts 15. The leaders got together and discussed things, and decided it wasn't right to impose circumcision and other traditions on the Gentiles. It was a big decision, to set all that aside and teach the new way - that salvation was by faith in Jesus only.

The young church was radical - a new religion, a break from the legalism of Judaism, no N.T. to guide them yet, no church structure in place - it gradually developed. And this young church had to face social and moral problems and decide what to do. It had to face questions of sexual behaviour, emperor worship, meat offered to idols. We buy meat from butchers. If the Gentiles wanted meat, they normally bought it from the pagan temple. If they didn't buy it there, there was nowhere else, so it was a real problem.

They had to face the question of how to help widows, and the poor, what to do about demon possession, health and healing. And how did you teach new converts who led fairly immoral lives up until their conversion a few days or weeks ago.

7.

The changes we face in today's society are real, but so were the changes God's people have had to face in times past. Let's see our challenges in proportion.

THE CHURCH AND CURRENT CHANGE.

PRIDE IN WHAT WE DO - Christian counsellors and ministers and marriage enrichment leaders have done a lot of positive work in stabilising and enriching the personal lives of so many. But there are some issues that have arisen this century that the Church hasn't shown much interest in.

ECOLOGY. I'm disappointed that the church hasn't shown much interest in ecology. God made a fantastic beautiful earth, He made so much variety that in any little area there are flowers and plants and birds and grubs that live only in that area, nowhere else. And on the grand scale he made the whole globe so that all these tiny variations balanced out to produce an earth that regenerated its forests, produced the right amount of oxygen and carbondioxide, and so on. But we are in the process of destroying that, destroying God's creation, and Christians don't even seem upset.

If you were in the same room as the Mona Lisa and someone tried to attack and destroy it, would you say OK, go ahead, it doesn't matter. Or would you at least say, Come on, that's a masterpiece you can't destroy that.

A lot of change in our society affects the poor, creates new groups of poor, and the church has always been good at helping the poor.

The world is a masterpiece that God made, and was very pleased with when he finished it, and now it's being severely damaged by pollution, bad farming practice, logging and so on.

As Christians, doesn't pain you? Can't you say "Stop, that's my Father's masterpiece you're spoiling".

Have you ever made something, and some silly kid or careless adult has damaged or destroyed it, and you feel the pain of something good you made being ruined for no really good reason.

God didn't give us spiritual life only. He gave us physical life and a physical earth, and we of all people who believe the earth is his creation, not just chance. should care for it.

I wish Christians were the ones showing the way, how to live without destroying God's creation.

RUSH AND BUSTLE.

Another change this century is rush and bustle. Jesus walked everywhere with his disciples. Walking and talking for hours on end sometimes, walking up into the hills to pray, early in the morning. We don't live like that. We rush from place to place and task to task. We rush from one person to another. One very nice capable lady in our church was talking to a non-Christian friend one day, and the non-Christian said, "I wouldn't want to be a Christian, or I'd end up like you" "What do you mean?" said the Christian lady. The non-Christian said "You're so busy, you're always busy". We think we're serving the Church and other people being so busy, but I wonder if God wants us to be so busy? Our health suffers if we're too busy for exercise. Our families suffer if we are too busy to spend time having fun with them. Our friendships wear a bit thin if we're too busy to put time into them. Our relationship with God suffers, if we're too busy to spend time with him. In the church we ask people to do this task and that task - we make them busy. We do it for good reasons. But I'm not sure that it's God's way. In our rush and bustle how often does he lead us beside still waters, how often does he make us lie down in green pastures, how often do we give him the chance? How can we change our church programs so that we wear people out less? The heavens declare the glory of God - how often have you gone out and looked at the stars this year? Are we too busy to pay any attention to God's handiwork?

TECHNOLOGY.

The third change you have listed on the sheets I gave you is technology, but I don't want to talk about that. I want to talk about LEGISLATION AND REGULATION of every part of our lives by government. When I was a kid we lived in the country, walked to the nearest farm each day and got a billy of milk. Then came a regulation that said milk must be pasteurised before it is sold, so we couldn't buy from the dairy any more. So we had to walk two miles to the nearest shop, buy it in bottles and carry them two miles home. And it cost us more. We were poor, we had no car. That legislation was supposed to protect us from bad milk, but it made life harder for us.

Many changes in legislation that were supposed to make life better have made it more complicated and more expensive. And the poor suffer again. I don't know what we as Christians can do, but I think we ought to be concerned and aware, and protest sometimes when things seem to be over-regulated. There are many other areas medicine, knowledge, changes that allow contraception, in-vitro fertilisation, abortion, so many changes that affect women. Christians as people need to think about these.