

New Wine, Old Wineskins and the Fear of Change

A woman from Orlando, Fla., was in the news last month because she decided to retire from driving her 1964 Mercury Comet. Rachel Veitch, who is 93, bought the car new for \$3,300 when gasoline cost 29 cents a gallon. Today the light yellow car, which Veitch calls “Chariot,” has 567,000 miles on it.

That’s great news for Veitch—who will probably get \$44,000 for the antique car because she took such good care of it. But whoever buys it will either store it in a fancy garage or display it at an auto show. There are not too many miles left on this relic of the past.

Cars have a life expectancy. Most 1964 Mercury Comets have long been doomed to the junkyard. Engines die, carburetors rust and models go out of style, so we trade them in for newer vehicles. In our fast-paced world, Apple debuts a new iPhone every few years and the most popular apps have almost monthly updates. We’ve come to expect frequent upgrades.

Yet for those of us involved in ministry, we tend to think the church needs no remodeling or renovation. We expect congregations to hum along perpetually for years and years, thinking the world will want to pile into our 1964 yellow Mercury Comet and enjoy the retro ride. But that is a faulty assumption.

While the message of the **gospel** itself is both timeless and flawless, the packaging we wrap it in must adapt with the times or we will quickly lose relevance. Pipe organs, steeples and choir robes were never wrong, but they won’t help us reach today’s generation. Nor do stale religious systems, tired terminology or worn-out denominational programs that should have been mothballed long ago. (The same can be said for

telethons on Christian TV that have the look and feel of a 1978 game show.)

Jesus told John the Baptist's disciples that people don't put new wine in **old wineskins** because the skins will burst and the wine will be wasted. "Put new wine into fresh wineskins, and both are preserved," Jesus said (Matt. 9:17, NASB). But many churches and ministries today insist on pouring their new wine in the old models, again and again. We resist innovation and we fight progress.

I'm willing to guess that 90 percent of what we are doing in church today needs a total makeover. We are facing the most daunting renovation project in the history of the church. But the task is not impossible. It will require us to take these painful steps:

1. We must break free from the fear of change. God is always on the move. He might lead us to camp in one spot for a while, but we can never get too comfortable in one place. His trumpet will eventually blow and the cloud of His presence will shift. Don't park when God is calling you forward. Stay open to His fresh directives, and expect Him to stretch your faith. He is adventurous!

2. We must be willing to defy tradition. People who are married to the past cannot embrace the future. Sacred cows do not belong in the pulpit; they must be sacrificed on the altar. "The way we've always done it" will not work in God's new season. The crowd chooses the comfortable pews of nostalgia, but God is with the courageous few who are willing to blaze a new path into unreached territory.

3. We must ask the Spirit to reveal His new strategies. We cannot rely on church growth gurus, popular books or rock-star preachers to lead us into genuine change. Copying spiritual trends is just a form of carnality—and it is a sad substitute for real innovation. If the work of transforming the church is

not totally led by the **Holy Ghost**, then our changes will be shallow and our impact will be pitiful. The last thing we need is a superficial upgrade.

I believe the Lord wants to unleash a gushing river of new wine into the church today, but He is directing us to prepare our wineskins. What is old must be renewed by the Spirit, what is outdated must be remodeled, and what is ineffective must be replaced. God wants to do a new thing. Don't resist it.

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