It Came to Pass

By Bob Mumford


Contents

Change in the Wind
Coming About
A Needed Overview
Scaffolding
Missing the Turns
When Do You Turn?
Avoiding the Boom
What Course Now?
The Eternal Perspective
The Positive Side of Change
The Process of Transformation
When We are Stubborn, Recalcitrant
and Refuse to Change
From Stage to Stage
Seasons of Change
Responding to Change
Summary
The story is told of an elderly man who was virtually unable to read, yet he would spend hours looking at the Scriptures. On each page he would search for the only words he understood: “It came to pass.” Upon discovering these four words, he would rejoice in the Lord, declaring, “Praise God! One thing I know, it didn’t come to stay, it came to pass!”

The statement, “it came to pass” speaks of change. The fact that change will come in our lives is entirely predictable. What is unpredictable is what that change will mean or accomplish. Because, for the most part, we neither want nor like change, we seek to avoid all that is uncertain. Since the 1960’s the whole world has been plunged into change with unprecedented rapidity and intensity. We feel the pressure of change on every side. Where mankind once felt almost invincible, the enormity of change now makes us wonder what the future really holds.

Change has challenged marriage and the structure of the family and created unusual and irregular lifestyles. Change has affected our language—we seem to live in a semantic jungle, unsure of what is being said, let alone what it might actually mean. Even our friends change. Friendship, we discover, is limited and defective, as economic or geographical changes can cause us to drift apart. Change can come suddenly or gradually. It can be obvious or barely perceptible; change can be
for the better or for the worse. If we are not careful to find the unchanging Christ in all of this, we could find ourselves isolated or alienated from life, people, the Church, and possibly from the Lord Himself.

Change in the Wind

Few pleasures can compare to a small sailboat knifing through the mighty ocean with her sails straining and her lines singing like violin strings being played by the giant bow of the wind. Each time the boat collides with a wave and parts it, a salty shower curls over the windward side to be slapped against eyes and cheeks by the force of the wind. The thrill of challenging water and wind in a contest that is half wrestling match and half ballet, can make sailing one of the most exciting activities.

The mechanics and logic of sailing are simple as long as you happen to be going in the same direction the wind is blowing. Complications arise when the place you want to go also happens to be the point from which the wind is blowing. Ancient mariners learned very quickly that it was impossible to sail directly into the wind, or what is called the no-go zone, because the sails did not catch enough wind to maintain way or forward momentum. Eventually the boat’s rudder
becomes completely ineffective in giving the boat direction. So, they mastered a skill known as tacking. Instead of sailing directly into the wind, they would steer a course of at least 45 degrees to either side of the direction from which the wind was blowing. After making a run in one direction for a period of time, they would then come about and sail a course 45 degrees in the other direction. By sailing in this zigzag pattern, they would, by some mysterious interaction of ship, water, and wind, progress in a generally forward direction. They did not proceed directly to their goal but at an angle to it.

Bringing a boat about at the end of a run is one of the more intricate moves of sailing. When it is time to come about, the helmsman pushes the rudder hard to bring the boat around for a run at the other angle to the wind. As the boat comes about, it swings directly into the wind. For a few moments it loses its speed and momentum in the water, the sails flap loose in the breeze, and everything seems disjointed and out of control. This, in sailing jargon, is known as *being in irons*. As the bow continues to swing around and the wind catches the sails again, the large boom that controls the sail swings across the deck. Anyone caught looking in the wrong direction at this critical moment can end up with anything from a nasty crack on the head to a cold dip in the ocean. As the sails find the wind and begin to fill, the
boat heels over into another course and everybody on board must once again reorient themselves for the most advantageous position for a smooth and balanced voyage. As inconvenient and awkward as the whole process may be, tacking is the only way of getting from one point to another when you happen to be sailing into the wind.

The Scripture pictures the people of God moving through human history as “the way of a ship in the middle of the sea” (Prov. 30:19). As the Church of Jesus Christ on the earth, we are moving both individually and corporately through history toward the inevitable goal ordained for us by the Father. Individually, our goal is to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. Corporately, our goal is to become the image of Christ as the redeemed community declaring His excellence in the earth. I believe it is part of the spiritual inheritance of every man and woman to be a New Testament Christian living within the context of a dynamic and powerful New Testament Church community. The truth God is restoring to the Body of Christ today is moving us toward this goal.

Something in the dynamics between the divine restoration of that truth and the human application of what God has given us seems to make it impossible for us to embrace the totality of New Testament truth all at once. Rather, we must “tack” into it little bits at a time, often seeming to be off course even though we are
making general progress in the right direction. Making course corrections requires discerning a change in the wind. A look at the progress of both historical events and the Body of Christ over the last few decades of my own journey will illustrate this “tacking” process more clearly.

## Coming About

1950s. My own introduction to the things of God came in the early 1950’s when Pentecostalism was at its zenith. As Pentecostals, we were sure that God had given us unique access to His Spirit, and surely, we would be the ones to usher in the advent of His Kingdom. Toward the end of the 1950’s, what had begun as a mighty move of God began to degenerate into competition and showmanship with an accompanying loss of integrity and credibility. The Lord took what was being exploited by a few and poured it out across the whole Body as was His original intention. This was known as the Voice of Healing. The Korean War began, Harry Truman ordered building a hydrogen bomb.

1960s. In the early 1960’s, however, the Lord began to lean hard on the rudder of the Body of Christ bringing it about into an entirely new and different direction. The Lord began to pour out His Holy Spirit on all churches across the Body
of Christ—without our permission! Evangelicals, Lutherans, Episcopalians, and Catholics alike were being baptized in the Holy Spirit, delivered from demonic activity, and many were physically healed. This became known as the Charismatic Renewal.

The hope for the sixties was that God would bring unity to His fragmented Church and restore it to its New Testament purity by the outpouring of His Spirit and the administration of His gifts. Unfortunately, by the late sixties the Charismatic Renewal had brought with its blessing and deliverance, some emphasis and teaching that was not entirely biblical. An unbalanced presentation of God’s blessings and love often developed into Charismatic humanism and “sloppy Agape.” The liberty of the Spirit often became spiritual anarchy with every man “doing what was right in his own eyes” and saying with great authority, “The Lord told me!”

1970s. To keep the Ship of the Kingdom from going off course, the Lord began in the 1970’s to emphasize biblical church order, government, the necessity of Kingdom leadership, and the difference between teaching and training. This was called discipleship. The most difficult of all these lessons were in the realm of interpersonal relationship, now known as relational theology. We were still moving in the same general direction, but our emphasis was different. The relationship
between husbands and wives and the home became the focal point of God’s activity in the Church. We began to understand that we would have to reach our goal corporately and that God would not allow us to charge up and take it as a mob. During these years, the need to disciple and train new leadership to carry on the work of the ministry within the Church community was made very clear to many leaders of all denominations.

1980s. In the 1980’s, the necessity to discern the change in the wind seemed to be more urgent and perhaps more difficult. The eighties were affected by the 1978 Jonestown Massacre, with hundreds of people committing suicide at the direction of a bizarre religious leader. This was also the era of the Reagan administration, the hostages held by Iran, and the fall of the Berlin Wall with the consequential collapse of worldwide communism. The eighties were the decade of expansion and greed, all the while accompanied with a new “hope” among us as evangelicals and conservatives that the Reagan Presidency would allow our nation to “turn toward God.” One problem we failed to consider or embrace was that Christian greed had not been acknowledged nor dealt with. Christian greed was powerfully manifested among the conservative political movements. Rather than humble servants proclaiming the life and love of Jesus, we manifested an angry, triumphalist attitude that made multitudes afraid of the Bible
and Jesus whom we sought to present. There was an absence of the servant’s heart toward a hurting and confused society. Light was somehow turning into a strange religious darkness. The message was that we must “possess our possessions,” “take our inheritance,” and use faith to coerce God to give us what He “promised.” The change was subtle, but total—from a gift of love to a love of gifts. The long term effect of these changes is still being felt and will be felt for some years to come. The Scripture admonishes us about those who “in their greed will exploit you with false words” (2 Pet. 2:3). With the effect being that we, as a believer, could wind up with “a heart trained in greed” (2 Pet. 2:14). The problem, as usual, is twofold—those who use and abuse and those who love to have it that way! It is one thing to deal with the kind of greed in the world or among those who do not profess to follow Christ. But there is a kind of greed—material and spiritual—that has deeply infected the Church of Jesus Christ as well.

1990s. As the eighties came to a close and we embarked into the nineties, there was no question that our ship had been forced into a change in the wind. Technology became an intricate part of everyday communications with the mass adoption of the cell phone and internet. With more advanced game consoles such as the Nintendo, committees had to be formed to monitor how much violence our children should be allowed to
watch. We had the Gulf War, the breakup of the USSR and overthrow of the Communist party, the Valdez oil spill, and on the medical front, the first use of gene therapy to treat diseases. Bill Clinton was elected President for two terms then impeached by the House of Representatives over a sex scandal. The World Trade Center in New York City, the Federal Building in Oklahoma City, and the Atlanta Olympics were bombed, and we had the Waco, Texas tragedy. The O.J. Simpson ordeal began. Great Britain returned control of Hong Kong over to China and Chinese soldiers immediately marched into the city. Scotland scientists cloned a sheep named “Dolly” forcing the creation of new cloning laws for humans. PlayStation sold 200 million units causing some states to restrict distribution of violent games to minors. Princess Diana died in a car crash. By the end of this decade, the world population was at 6 billion and the Y2K Millennium frenzy was at its peak. 11 countries in Western Europe adopted the universal currency called the Euro-dollar, J.F.K. Jr. died in a plane crash, and the massacre at Columbine High School left 15 dead.

2000s. The years 2000 – 2010 were no less full of change and turmoil than the previous decade. The terrorist attacks on New York and Washington on 9/11 created a global war on terrorism. Presidential election results were stalled, forcing much debate and the Supreme Court ruling that
George W. Bush was the winner. In the war on terror, the U.S. invaded Afghanistan to overthrow the Taliban regime and to find Osama Bin Laden, head of the Al Qaeda terrorist organization. The U.S. also invaded Iraq, located, tried, and hung Saddam Hussein who allegedly had weapons of mass destruction. Yasser Arafat, historic leader of the Palestinian resistance, and John Paul II, leader of the modern Catholic Church, died. Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans causing death and destruction from central Florida to Texas. An earthquake and subsequent tsunami in the Indian Ocean caused the deaths of nearly 300,000 people in several Asian countries. The U.S. is in a recession and sits on the brink of financial collapse due to a crisis caused by so-called subprime mortgages and the U.S. government established a multibillion dollar plan to help banks that were on the verge of bankruptcy. Unemployment reaches 10.2%. Barack Obama becomes the first African-American U.S. president. Music lovers mourned the death of Michael Jackson, the king of pop who died at the age of 50. At the end of this decade, Obama sent 30,000 soldiers to Afghanistan.

2010s. A 7.0-magnitude earthquake devastates Haiti, leveling many sections of the city and destroying the country’s infrastructure including Parliament, tax offices, schools, and hospitals leaving the death toll at 200,000 people. An 8.8 magnitude earthquake hit killing some
750 people, badly damaging communication and transportation systems, and leaving as many as 1.5 million people displaced. Conflict in Iraq and Afghanistan continued to increase. A volcanic explosion in Iceland resulted in an ash plume in the atmosphere over northern and central Europe affecting air travel for a week and causing the cancellation of several thousand flights and disrupting the travel plans of millions of people. A BP oil drilling rig off the coast of Louisiana exploded killing 11 people and sending 13,000 gallons of crude oil per hour pouring into the Gulf of Mexico for 86 days. A Picasso painting, completed in one day in 1932, sells for a record-breaking $106.5 million at a Christie’s auction. U.S. troops and CIA operatives kill Osama bin Laden in Pakistan, and after more than 50 years of struggle, South Sudan declares independence and becomes Africa’s 54th state.

A Needed Overview

In many places, large and small churches alike are still in irons, i.e., the sails are flapping loose in the wind and the church has essentially come to a standstill, aimlessly drifting. This is always spiritually dangerous (see Heb. 2:1 3). Years ago, a travelling evangelist helped me to see the issue quite plainly. I asked him, “What are you preaching as
you travel from church to church?” He responded with alacrity, “We shall reign with Christ.” Partly in jest, I said, “What about the other half of the verse, “If we suffer with Him?” Without hesitating, he said, “I never preach that part because it affects the offering.” Then, I understood why the apostle made such a point to say “I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God” (Acts 20:27). A free translation of the Greek says, “My conscience is open before God, for I have never shrunk from declaring to you the complete (full) will or counsel (plan) of God.” Why did He use the word shrink? What is it about what God plans to do that would cause anyone to want to shrink from saying it? Shrinking has to do with our attempt to avoid that which will, without question, cause controversy and some degree of alienation. Jesus, to my surprise and chagrin, never shrinks from needed confrontation. Agape is the most confrontational biblical insight that any of us will ever engage.

In looking over the past six decades, it may appear that the Church is somewhat staggering through history as it zigzags first in one direction and then in another. However, those who can grasp the overall history of the Body of Christ can attest that we are much closer to the goal of a New Testament Church today than we were in the 1950’s. The changes have been painful but very rewarding and always maturing.
What causes the Spirit of God to bring the Body of Christ about and head it into a new direction? If the helmsman allows his ship to continue along any single run of a tack for too long, eventually the ship will go off course and miss the intended destination. In order to keep the ship on its general course, he must continually come about and make the needed course corrections. In a rough analogy, if the Spirit of God did not make continual course corrections in the Body of Christ, our human inability to administrate the things of the Kingdom of God adequately would eventually take us off course and cause us to miss our ultimate goal or cause us to be destroyed on the rocks of presumption and religious politics.

Believers who have experienced one or more of the Lord’s course corrections know that the adjustments of coming about and reorienting themselves to a new direction in the Spirit can be painful and difficult. Not only do we discover that the ocean tides of history, social pressure, and public opinion are against us; we also find that the spiritual physics of God’s Kingdom make sailing directly into the winds of His purpose virtually impossible. Usually my own initial awareness that a course correction is taking place is the boom catching the back of my head and nearly knocking me half conscious into the water! It is a rude awakening. It would be much more pleasant if the Lord allowed the transition periods
to be gentler and less frustrating. However, the difficulty and stretching of the adjustment period is all part of God’s economy toward keeping us flexible and open to the leading of His Spirit. A string of unbroken success in the life of any man or any group can be very dangerous. This is what I call the deception of unbroken success.

Scaffolding

Scaffolding is only used in the construction of a building; it does not support the building. Once the building is complete, the scaffolding is taken down. It may come as a surprise to some of us that the building continues to stand after the Lord removes the scaffolding. Sometimes it is hard for us to remember that the Kingdom of God is not made up of meetings or organizations. These are part of the necessary scaffolding, which will eventually be removed. Each time we come to another tack and another change in the wind, we are forced to leave some things behind. What we must abandon is the scaffolding, not the building. In the process, we discover that God has added to us understanding that we never had before. We do not want to miss the mark and continue on the same course, but neither can we go back the way we came.

My foundation consists of rich and valuable
Pentecostal roots, coupled with a strong theological base from an Episcopalian Seminary, and enhanced repeatedly by fresh encounters with the Holy Spirit. These foundational truths will never change. Foundational truth is not scaffolding; it will always remain part of the building. If I had rejected everything that was part of my experience in those days, I would not only be losing the scaffolding, I would also be removing part of the foundation. We must always build on the foundation of Jesus Christ, His Word in Holy Scripture, and the Person and ministry of the Holy Spirit. These will always be an ongoing and eternal part of our experience.

Much of God’s purpose in allowing us to go through major course corrections is to bring about death to that which is carnal and unredeemable. Christ is inexorably committed to burning the chaff. Part of our fleshly nature dies when we have to change our habitual way of doing things, our private revelations, and our comfortable spiritual environment. One of the essential steps toward a New Testament Church community is a practical understanding of what it means to walk in unity within the Body of Christ. Each one of us has experienced the attitude that says, “When everyone else wises up, they will do things our way.” Each time we are forced to come about and make a course correction, more of that
attitude dies, and we are better able to accept other members of the larger Body of Christ for what God has done in them rather than how they compare to our standards and our own way of doing things.

Missing the Turns

What happens if an individual or group misses the opportunity to “come about”? If the Spirit of God turns the boat and we keep going without the Spirit, it leaves only one realm for us to walk in—religious carnality. Wherever there are groups or individuals who have missed the turn, there is a certain deadness and dryness about them. There is a tendency toward rules, regulations, legalism, backbiting, strife, factions, and religious activity. There is generally a breakdown in sexual and moral conduct and strong emphasis on either religious asceticism or fleshly liberty. Nothing is crueler than religion that has missed God’s purpose and is out of touch with His Spirit.

Many who missed the turn in the early seventies went into religious humanism, antinomianism, and spiritual anarchy. What was meant to be a heart response in joyful service to the love of God became the Galatian heresy whereby we “began in the Spirit” then attempted to become perfected by
the flesh (see Gal. 3:3).

A proper understanding of how God deals with us as His children is essential for properly walking toward maturity (see Heb. 12:5 13). However, dwelling too much on God’s dealings and disciplines makes us subjective and introspective to the point of spiritual paralysis. Our goal is to get through the dealings of God and into His eternal purpose. Additionally, we must be careful not to overemphasize principles, order, and organization. In an effort to bring direction, purpose, and maturity to God’s people, it is easy to emphasize principles at the expense of people, order at the expense of the creativity of the Spirit, and organization at the expense of God’s sovereignty. Always and ever, the final issue is an Agape relationship with both the God whom we profess to love and follow and with those He has surrounded us with.

When Do You Turn?

How do we know when God is making a course correction in our lives, in our fellowship, or in the whole Body of Christ without sailing off into some fleshly excess before we realize we have gone too far? There are seven basic spiritual symptoms that appear in varying degrees as God prepares to bring us about into a new direction:
1. **Dissatisfaction and frustration.** These are two very healthy signs. When we are experiencing frustration, it means we are not happy with where we are. Deep down inside there is the feeling that what we are doing now may not be that which we are supposed to be doing and, consequently, does not fill the needs or answer our questions. We also know that we cannot go back the way we came. Dissatisfied and frustrated people are very open to what God is ready to do next.

2. **Sense of divine resistance.** Gradually or suddenly, there comes an awareness that we are no longer totally in step with the Spirit of God. Galatians 5:25 admonishes us to, “Walk in the Spirit” or keep in step with the Spirit. As the Lord heads us into a course change, He may begin to first slow us down by gently putting His hand against us in order to get our attention. Prayers do not get answered like they used to, blessing doesn’t flow as freely as it once did, and there is an absence of the sense that God is undertaking for us as He once did.

3. **Being threatened by what God is doing elsewhere.** The dissatisfaction and frustration with our own situation often causes us to be threatened when we see others enjoying and moving in what God is doing. God often provokes us to jealousy by allowing others to enjoy what we have taught.

4. **Lack in our own experience.** Somehow the
reality and presence of God’s fellowship does not seem as real and vital as it once did. A hunger to renew and rejuvenate our daily walk and fellowship with Him may begin. This is the issue of “first love.”

5. Discouragement and tiredness. Gradually we become tired of doing things the same way we always did them. What was once full of joy and excitement is now lacking life and fruit. We may find ourselves going through our normal daily activity with a lack of enthusiasm, physical tiredness, and general malaise.

6. Uselessness. As we look at our lives, we may begin to wonder if the Kingdom of God wouldn’t be better off without us. There may come a yearning for a higher cause to which to give ourselves, a greater degree of fruitfulness in the lives of others, and a desire to be used in a deep or more rewarding way. This is why many have left the church to give themselves to social concerns and human action.

7. Out of date. This is the subtle feeling that somehow God has “left us behind.” You might hear about a move of God happening somewhere and wonder why it’s not happening at your church and feel left out.

The Lord in His mercy allows these warnings to begin creeping into our life for us to become aware that something needs to change. Our
dissatisfaction and frustration make us more open and ready to embrace what God does when He brings the boat about and we find it necessary to reorient ourselves and make some painful and difficult adjustments.

Avoiding the Boom

There are a few factors that will enable us to make the reorientation when God brings the boat about and the boom comes swinging across the deck.

1. Love of adventure. There needs to be a little bit of a pioneer in each of us. We must be willing to leave our comfort zone and launch out into the uncertainty and danger of the unknown. All adventure and progress involve risk of some kind. Few people are fully aware that if you start this journey there is the real possibility that you could end up a spiritual casualty. We are in a real war so there are real casualties. When we started out, we all thought we could just walk up and take the land. It was a rude awakening to realize that some of us would have to pay very dearly for beginning that journey. We underestimated the vastness of the wilderness, the dryness of the desert, the darkness of the valleys, and the size and cunningness of the enemy.

The Scripture says of Abraham, “he went out,
not knowing where he was going” (Heb. 11:8). It is also clearly recorded that God told Abraham he was to go to the land of Canaan (Gen. 12:1-5). Although Abraham knew his destination, he had to journey by faith for he had no idea how God was going to get him there. Like Abraham, we know the goal toward which we are striving as the Body of Christ, and, like Abraham, we journey in a walk of faith not entirely knowing how we are going to get there. The journey may sound exciting and the rewards glorious while we are sitting comfortably at home, but the reality and fear of the unknown may seem a little less exciting after the pain of two or three course corrections.

2. Pliability and flexibility. Like a lump of cold, hard clay, each of us must be kneaded under the warmth of the Holy Spirit in order to become flexible and pliable enough to fit into what God is doing. Once the clay is left alone, however, it quickly becomes hard and cold again. It is possible to become a Pharisee in 24 hours. All it takes is to believe that we have gone as far in God as anyone can go and that we possess the greatest degree of revealed truth in the Body of Christ. At any point, we can settle for what God has already given us, thus becoming unchangeable and rigid. If we refuse to make the next course correction, God, as a Father, offers two expensive opportunities. First is His offer for us to get off the bus. He said to His own disciples, “You do not want to go away
also, do you?” (John 6:67). The Kingdom is not an imposition. Second, He uses the “take another trip around the mountain” provision. Knowing that we do not have the maturity to make the change, He brings it around again and again until we finally get it right. If you are beginning to recognize the scenery, perhaps you should ask the difficult question. Perhaps embracing the course correction is so difficult because it usually involves a major change. If we only turned a few degrees, we would not have to leave so much behind and embrace so many things that seem to contradict all we have just learned.

3. Travel light. Anyone who is always dragging with them the baggage of what God used to do will have difficulty being flexible and pliable. “Forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward...” (Phil. 3:13). Those who live in the past cannot enjoy the present nor embrace the future. All too often, the present and the future seem to contradict the past. The “good old days” are a deception of our society and an unbiblical approach to the Christian life. God’s Word says we are going from victory to victory and glory to glory. Letting go of what is behind not only means releasing the mistakes, it may also mean letting go of some real and wonderful things given to us by the Spirit, which are part of the scaffolding and no longer needed.
4. **Willingness to pay the price.** The price of the course correction was set by the Lord Jesus’ death and resurrection. Paul says, “We had the sentence of death within ourselves in order that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead” (2 Cor. 1:9). Death and resurrection are the willingness to let the old ways, the old groups, the old positions, and the old ideas be laid to rest in the hope that a new and better resurrection will come as the wind fills the sails and we start on a new course. Sometimes the resurrection can hurt more than the death. After ten years or more of a “run,” it is easy to get the “quits.” We are tired of fighting the devil, the flesh, and our brothers and sisters. It seems like there is too much hassle, too much resistance, and too much pain to make it worth the reward. How much easier it would be to go back to what we had known in the past than to get ourselves together and prepare for what God will do next. But as much as we might like to lie down and rest, we must remember that the cloud of God’s Presence keeps moving, and that gives us no acceptable alternative.

5. **Be rooted in Christ.** In order to make it through the change in the wind, we must possess a personal fellowship and experiential relationship with the Lord Jesus through His Holy Spirit. We are getting closer and closer to the time when everything around us will be shaken. The only unshakable thing in the universe is Christ and
His Kingdom. Unless we are personally rooted with a solid salvation experience, water baptism, and a flowing baptism in the Holy Spirit, we are candidates to be shaken. The Christians who usually have the most problem with the course corrections are the “cultural Christians” who do what everybody else does, talk like everybody else talks, and go along with what the pastor says not on the basis of a personal conviction and relationship with the Lord but because somebody else heard from God and this seemed to be the right way to walk. Father’s ultimate purpose is to remove by shaking all that is not of Christ and fill by Christ everything in the created Universe. This is the pearl and the treasure.

What Course Now?

What should we, could we, be looking for in the coming years? I will try to state as clearly as I can five things that I see for the next few years. Perhaps we could reexamine them in the future to see how accurate we were with this evaluation.

1. Reality therapy. Our beautiful theories are going to be mugged by gangs of ugly facts! The humanistic formed God of past years is not the whole, true God of the Bible. Someone once said that when we meet the God of the Bible, we may love Him but we may not like Him. It was Emile
Durkheim who clarified our inexorable tendency to make God in our own image rather than man being made in God’s image. Reality therapy is simply a way of stating that God is a Father—a patient one—but a Father nonetheless. He intends to deal with expansionism and greed at all levels, especially the Christian kind. Reality is not to be avoided or feared. The Kingdom perspective is: The closer we are to reality, the closer we are to God Himself, for He is ultimate reality.

2. Restored content. From the sixties, seventies, and through the eighties there was a minimizing, almost accommodating attitude toward serious biblical doctrines, the loss of which could seriously injure us. “If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?” (Ps. 11:3). Unity movements like Council on Church Unity, the influence of Ecumenism, the absence of tolerance for absolutes, an attitude that “we are all going toward the same place” have created a climate that does not want to be exclusive, specific, or clear. The objective is to keep it all fuzzy; head for the roundhouse, they cannot corner us there! My deep prophetic sense is that the Holy Spirit will once again isolate and emphasize certain biblical doctrines that will cause pain and force adjustment to those of us who seek and proclaim spiritual unity. We have inadvertently crossed important doctrinal lines to find it. The Holy Spirit will again reemphasize Christ’s Lordship, His exclusive route
to the Father, the fact that the New Jerusalem—whatever your understanding or interpretation—does have walls, leaving some on the inside and some on the outside. Please remember this kind of “sorting out” is the responsibility of a sovereign God, not yours or mine.

3. Realignment of the objective / subjective balance. There have always been two “camps” in the Christian church, those who believe the total sufficiency of the Scripture and who de-emphasize, avoid, or even categorize Christian “experiences” as fleshly, unnecessary emotionalism, or even demonic. In the other camp are those who believe in the Scriptures equally intensely, but believe faith has its rewards in God by means of the Holy Spirit. Thus, God, in response to faith, will reveal Himself in signs, wonders, and gifts of the Holy Spirit. With the knowledge of severely oversimplifying a complex problem, look for the Lord to force experience on a great many of His people who really need to know Him in this sovereign manner. Conversely, be aware of the Lord forcing those drowning in a sea of feelings and subjectivity to embrace the adequacy of the written Word—with or without accompanying feelings. God knows we need to meet in the middle!

4. Reemergence of real evil. The fact that the power of the Gospel has subdued and prevented overt satanic and demonic evil in our nation is
self evident for those of us who have travelled globally. Other nations who openly worship demons know how frightening real evil is. Look for real evil to emerge in America in the overt form of satanic ritual, demonic manifestation, and other overt behavior that cannot be explained by humanistic philosophy. So far, all evil has been explained by lack of education, poverty, and abuse of whatever kind. I do not minimize the effects of these problems in society whatever the geography or racial distinction. What I am saying is that as a nation we have increasingly rejected and forgotten God. This will allow real evil to emerge for the purpose of forcing a nation back to the God of its fathers. This is not a prophecy on my part, but the elucidation of the principle that nature abhors a vacuum. In the vacuum of spiritual hunger will emerge demonic activity and behavior that I have categorized as real evil (see Rev. 18:23). Those who have traveled to other nations know the unquestioned reality of the demonic. America presents the demonic in a much more sophisticated manner.

5. *Return mania.* As we approach the year 2017, look for a plethora of doctrines, books, revelations, and “proofs” of the imminent return of the Lord Jesus. Forewarned is to be forearmed, please prepare yourself for unmitigated confusion concerning Christ’s return. There are several reasons:
a) Second Coming hysteria occurred from the year 999 to the year 1000, repeated in 1999 to the year 2000, and may occur again in 2017. As the events surrounding the re-alignment of the nations to the Kingdom, many will interpret the events as the last days.

b) These messages on Christ’s return will result in increased media exposure. It will also be the source of embarrassment for more balanced believers.

c) Products on the end times sell well. Since expansionism and greed has not yet been expunged, prepare for the resultant confusion.

d) The fact that no man can know the “time or the season” is biblically clear. We can, however, recognize the corporate expression of the Bride of Christ (His larger Church) and the voice of the Holy Spirit coming together in unity, a love cry, and longing for the Bridegroom. When this happens, we can all rejoice in the preparation described in Revelation 22:17, “And the Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come.’” This signifies that the Bride has become mature enough to desire or cry out for His coming. It also indicates that the Holy Spirit acknowledges that His work is completed (see John 14:26). Thus, He can add His voice to the Bride’s voice saying with a universal, unified voice, “‘Yes, I am coming quickly.’ Amen. Come, Lord Jesus” (Rev. 22:20).
The Eternal Perspective

Spiritually, we need to seek God, spend time in His Word, and utilize all of the other means of grace available to us so that we might be prepared to draw on His grace to respond properly during our seasons of change. Only when we comprehend how frightening and intimidating life can be when lived in the presence of change will we see the necessity of anchoring ourselves in the unchanging Christ. It is reassuring to know that although we are required by God to live in time, He Himself lives in eternity. Therefore, we need to have the overview of His eternal perspective before attempting to examine the individual aspects of change and its implications in our lives.

Revelation 11:15 declares, “The kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ.” Most of us probably remember those words from the stirring “Hallelujah Chorus” of Handel’s Messiah. But isn’t it understandable that in order for God to move toward that given point in history, it would require drastic social, political, and economic change?

Saying “yes” to God in the process of change is a function of the will, motivated by vision. It is one of the activities of His Church that brings the Father satisfaction.
I am filled with hope that in the present “shake up” with unprecedented change in the world economics, world leadership, and world religion that God is moving all things toward that time when He shall turn over the kingdom of this world to His Son! The Holy Spirit, in all of His activity, is seeking to present us with a renewed vision and confidence toward the future. God is calling us to embrace change and, by that act, participate in the challenge of His predetermined goal.

The Positive Side of Change

It’s obvious from what we see going on in society that constant change can have a very negative effect upon us. As a matter of fact, the Bible even warns us in Proverbs 24:21: “Do not associate with those who are given to change.” However, change has a positive side when it comes in the context of God’s purposes. When I was writing this, one of my friends said, “At least you are writing about something you really do understand!”

Change, as designed by God the Creator, is that unavoidable process of life that moves us both naturally and spiritually from where we are to where He wants us to be. As we find our place in God’s plan, then, it is inevitable that we will
encounter change; the Almighty is inexorably moving toward a point in history, which He has chosen. But what I want to force home is not the necessity of recognizing that change will come but rather the importance of responding properly when change does come.

The Process of Transformation

Change is inherent to the nature of the Kingdom of God. God is not given to instant anything. As I understand the ways of God the Father, He uses two forms of growth to bring forth His purpose. The first is gradualism—the policy of approaching a desired end by gradual stages—the method God most often uses. The second is iterative—that necessary process of life since we simply are not able to do everything correctly the first time. As time goes on, God progresses toward His goal. He moves men and nations, whether they move voluntarily or involuntarily, toward His own chosen point in history.

In the gospel of Mark, Jesus illustrates the progressive nature of the kingdom of God:

And He was saying, “The kingdom of God is like a man who casts seed upon the ground, and he goes to bed at night and gets up by day and the seed sprouts up and grows—how, he himself does not know. The earth produces
crops by itself; first the blade, then the head, then the mature grain in the head” (Mark 4:26-28).

Notice two simple but powerful lessons. First, the need to rest—“he goes to bed at night”—for God really does have the entire process under His control. Second, the necessity of progression: “first the blade, then... then....”

On the authority of the Lord and the laws of God written in nature, we can unequivocally declare that Father is not looking for instant maturity. Rather, it is a process of transformation whereby we are conformed to the image of Christ (see Rom. 8:29). Paul describes it as a transformation in 2 Corinthians 3:18 and declares that the change is “from glory to glory.”

As the locust leaves the shell that is too small for it on the bark of the tree—forced, if you will, into a process of unwilling change—so we also have no alternative but to recognize and embrace the seasons of change brought into the sphere of our own existence. These include natural changes—geographical, financial and physical. They also include spiritual change—“When I was a child, I used to speak as a child, reason as a child; when I became a man (change), I did away with childish things” (1 Cor. 13:11). We need to understand that in the process of growing up in God, “childhood” is not unnecessary or unacceptable,
just inadequate and limited as applied to God’s design for life.

When We are Stubborn, Recalcitrant, and Refuse to Change

The alternative to being open to change and seeing it as God’s necessary method is to approach life—naturally and spiritually—in a fixed, mechanistic manner. This seems to produce a certain security in some people but seldom, if ever, does it yield maturity. An attitude of opposition to change makes it necessary for God to reveal Himself more drastically or even cataclysmically in our lives to precipitate the changes He deems necessary.

My more than five decades of walking with the Lord yield this observation: the Lord God arranges life in a series of seasons—longer or shorter—so that as His people we do not become crystallized, out of date, or spiritually useless. Jeremiah the prophet describes a situation that was unchanged or, perhaps, refused to change:

Moab has been at ease since his youth; he has to also been undisturbed on his Iees, neither has he been emptied from vessel to vessel, nor
has he gone into exile. **Therefore, he retains his flavor and his aroma has not changed** (Jer. 48:11 NAS my emphasis).

Being “at ease” and “undisturbed,” refusing or ignoring change (being “emptied from vessel to vessel”), caused Moab to remain unchanged and without purification or progress.

We need to see the positive lesson in this as well. If we refuse to be “at ease” and desire for the Lord to “disturb” us, embracing change with joy and alacrity, then, when He pours us from “vessel to vessel,” we shall progress “from glory to glory” and the flavor and aroma of the person of Christ will appear. I know of no other process for the redemptive presence of our Savior to be manifested in our lives.

In Philippians 3, the apostle Paul describes his state in life before his encounter with the Lord Jesus Christ:

> Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things again is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you. Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision; for we are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh, although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put
confidence in the flesh, I far more: circumcised
the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the
tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to
the Law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of
the church; as to the righteousness which is in
the Law, found blameless. But whatever things
were gain to me, those things I have counted
as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that,
I count all things to be loss in view of the
surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my
Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all
things, and count them but rubbish so that I
may gain Christ, and may be found in Him,
not having a righteousness of my own derived
from the Law, but that which is through faith
in Christ, the righteousness which comes from
God on the basis of faith, that I may know
Him and the power of His resurrection and the
fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed
to His death; (Philippians 3:1–10).

Notice that he ends the account of drastic
and dramatic change by recognizing the “losses”
he had to sustain in order to know Christ, stating
that they were nothing in comparison to knowing
the Lord. What we need to see is that they were
real losses. They were costly changes to Paul as he
embraced the process of coming to know the Lord.
However, resistance, ignorance, or refusal of the
process would have been much more expensive
spiritually for this man to whom Christ was his very life.

Picture a seventy-year-old “teeny-bopper.” Her dress and behavior are an attempt to deny her age, status, or assigned position in life. She has refused to change. Despite her desire to project an image of youth by dressing in clothes that are unbefitting and out of character, it is immediately apparent that she is an emotionally underdeveloped adult. Whether because of fear of growing old, or perhaps fear of the future, or whatever reason, she has refused to change. In contrast, God is looking for people like Paul who, embracing the costly process of change, grow into maturity in the Lord.

From Stage to Stage

Let us make a spiritual application, drawing from the process of maturity in the natural. The Bible is very clear that there are various phases of the Christian experience. Being born again refers to the spiritual new birth and the attending period of infancy. The Scriptures speak of young men meaning a period of spiritual adolescence and of fathers denoting spiritual maturity in a full biblical sense (see 1 Jn. 2:12-13). Stages of growth are an established fact in Scripture. And in the natural, the traumatic but necessary process
of growing up is well-known to all of us. But our familiarity with the process doesn’t remove the struggle and excitement of proceeding from one stage to the next. There are the “terrible twos” of early childhood and later the difficulties of puberty. The wild and wonderful teenage years are followed by the intense responsibility of career choice, marriage, and family. And with each stage comes a new set of changes to which we must adjust.

Picturing the process of change will help us to put it in spiritual context. The amount and degree of change necessary to proceed from one of these stages to the other is astounding. When God in His own time (Gal. 4: 1-2) decides to move us from one stage to the next, an amazing phenomenon occurs. It could be described as spiritual “nakedness.” When the spiritual diapers are removed (stage one), we find ourselves in a condition where all of the spiritual and biblical things we knew—how we prayed, what we had experienced, etc.—are subjected to change. Since we are not capable of arriving at stage two in one spiritual leap, we could experience—for a short or longer period—a time of being spiritually awkward, not quite as sure of ourselves as we were in stage one. We say to ourselves, “At least there (stage one) I was secure, and things were quiet and predictable.” The transition from stage one to stage two is traumatic but very necessary.

Fear can cause us to cling to the knowledge,
experience, and security of stage one. Where are you taking me, Lord? Why now? We must not be fearful or uncertain, for He is taking us on into spiritual maturity for His name`s sake as well as for our benefit and adventure!

Obviously, as in the natural, the transition from stage two to stage three is much more complex, far more exciting, yet less understood. My own conviction is that we are all so subnormal in relation to biblical maturity that anyone in stage two is usually already considered to be a “father.” That can present some difficulties for us when we are in the transition to another stage because people are expecting us to be more mature than we are. Sometimes it ends up that those who respect us for our spiritual maturity or, in some manner, look to us for leadership, behold us instead acting like a spiritual teenager, uncertain ourselves whether we want to face new responsibilities and change. It is equally exciting when our stock answers, biblical formulas, and surefire methods of approaching the Lord no longer work in the same efficient manner as they once did. Why, Lord? What did I do? Is there unconfessed sin in my life? All those questions indicate that we are in the crucible of our gracious Master. He loves us unreservedly just like we are, but He does not intend to leave us in our present stage of spiritual progress.
The first Psalm says of the righteous man that “his leaf shall not wither and he shall bring forth fruit in his season.” If we couple the concept of the stages of spiritual growth with an understanding that God as Creator and Redeemer does things in an ongoing cycle of seasons, then we get a grasp of the continual and seasonal nature of change.

Genesis 8:20-22 declares that the seasons will never cease as long as the world stands. If we are forced to live in time (we really have no choice in the matter), then we are required to recognize that all of life has seasons. Without going into all the scriptural proof-texts to substantiate that point, let us agree that seasons are basic to God’s purposes for us.

Although the psalmist speaks of the righteous bringing forth fruit, He doesn’t require fruit out of season (see Matt. 21:41). When the Lord cursed the fig tree, it was not due to the absence of fruit, but for declaring to the world by its leaves that it had fruit, when, in fact, it did not. This is a severe lesson for all of us: we must be careful never to make false impressions of spirituality.

The apostle Paul instructs Timothy to “be ready in season and out of season.” By this, I understand him to mean that he should be aware
of the seasons in the Christian experience and function accordingly. We can continue to function effectively out of season if we can interpret that is what is happening.

The natural seasons give us an enlightening picture of the spiritual seasons we experience.

Spring. This is a time of resurrection. Everything is green and full of growing life. All seems to multiply and grow. New birth is everywhere, and all of life seems full of hope and expectancy. Everything and anything we put our hand to seems to be blessed and fruitfulness seems guaranteed.

Summer. This is the time when the Lord puts the heat on; it is a time of growth and maturity. Vines, fruit trees, and Christians seem to soak up the increased heat of the Son.

Fall. Harvest is the favorite time of year for many. Spiritually, it is a time of ingathering. The fruit of the Spirit seem to be ripening in our lives. It is during this season that we want to store for ourselves clear concepts of God’s goodness and His faithfulness and secure all we are and have in the Savior’s constant love because another season fast approaches.

Winter. Some winters are mild and pass quickly. Others, it seems, are very cold and seem to be everlasting. Cold north winds blow upon our gardens (see Song of Solomon 4:16). It seems to be a time when everything God planted in us lies
dormant under a snowy cover, waiting for another season to come. As it is in the natural with the farmer, winter is a time of rest and preparation. It is a time to repair the equipment and live in hope. For the farmer knows one thing that we must know as well—spring is coming and winter really will pass!

I became a minister by appointment given to me for you from God, to accomplish the divine intention, the secret hidden from the ages, and from the nations, but now made manifest to His saints by whom God has decided to publish amongst the heathen what is the wealth of that mystery of the rectification which Christ is to you —the hope of the rectification — which we proclaim; warning every man; and teaching every person in a perfect philosophy, so that we may present each one perfect in Christ; to which object I vigorously strive with His mighty energy working in me” (Col. 1:25-29, E. Fenton).

Responding to Change

Following are five steps that will enable us to respond properly to the changes that will inevitably come our way as we go on in the purposes of God:
1) *Deal openly* and up front with our fear and avoidance of change. No one particularly likes change, unless it is serving to relieve some greater pressure or it is allowing us to escape from some increasing responsibility. Spiritual reality requires us to face our fears of the future. We must seek to manage our emotional discomfort when things, people, or (heaven forbid) we, ourselves, begin to change.

2) *Seek the Lord* for the spiritual perception so necessary to see God’s possibility in every problem. Reading the Scriptures can teach us that God resides in every problem and uses it for His own purpose (see Rom. 8:28). Spiritual perception helps us to see that what *is* can be changed to what *ought to be*. Have confidence in His nature knowing that He would not allow this unless it was designed to do us good.

3) *Recognize* that death and resurrection was a method that was modeled by our Lord and then given to us as a way of life. We must have the will and the vision to accept death and resurrection as the path to change. Saying “yes” to God in the process of change is a function of the will, motivated by vision.

4) *Understand* that change produces three immediate results:

a) *Freedom*. Each time we change, we leave old habits, patterns, and fears behind stepping out
into His freedom (see John 8:32).

b) **Courage.** Experiencing that freedom fuels the fire of our being able to rise again. Following each death that precedes change, we must rise again to the new and difficult challenge of facing the unknown and the unfamiliar.

c) **Faithfulness.** Every Christian wants to think of himself as being faithful to the Lord, to himself, and to others. Freedom and courage is the stuff faithfulness is made of.

5) **Experience Jesus Christ** at the very center of our lives. If the Lord is my life, nothing else and no one else can take center stage—not ministry, goals, or projects. We must experience Him. He is the unchangeable Christ in a frightening culture that seems to have lost its way. Being Christ-centered will enable us to integrate and interact with others who will help us embrace the exciting process of change. Remember our previous statement: Father is fully intent on removing everything in Creation that is not of Christ and is equally and fully committed to fill everything with Christ.

The intention of this message is to help us recognize that change is unavoidable and very much a part of the nature of God. If we are unreceptive to this process, we will have great difficulty obtaining the completeness that can be ours.
Summary

There is a renewed emphasis in the ministry of the prophet and a deep stirring within the heart of God’s people for evangelism, outreach, and declaration of God’s Word with signs and wonders confirming the Gospel. It is my prayer for the Body of Christ and for everyone who receives this *Plumbline* that as we approach the future, we covenant before God to keep in step with His Spirit no matter what direction He may choose or what corrections He must make. We do not know when God will change directions again. We would do well to yield the running of the Ship to Him without undue questions. We have committed ourselves to a heavenly Father who has proven His love. Let us, therefore, commit ourselves to the completion of our journey and the attaining of our goal even if, like the saints of the Old and New Testaments, we never live to see the fulfillment of that for which we hope. Yet, like them, let us be faithful to do what we can to prepare the way for those who will follow in our footsteps.

I trust that the next time each of us is confronted with the choice of change we will accept it with courage and rise to face the unknown. My prayer for myself and for you is this: *Lord, let Your changes come and help us fully embrace them so that we might become a more perfect example of Your Agape nature!*