

PARADIGM SHIFTING - I
GROWING A HEALTHY CHURCH SERIES
Text: Ezekiel 18:1-4

Key Word: Shift

Key Thought: It Is Time for the Church to Grow past its past Failures

In the 25+ years that I have served in this city as a pastor I've noticed a number of trends that have taken place. Some have been quite positive. One of these has been a sustained and growing unity amongst the pastors and churches. This has led to a wonderful sense of solidarity as we strive to extend the kingdom of God.

Other trends have not been so positive. One that seems to stick out in my mind is that of reaching too many plateaus and remaining there. I believe that much of the reason behind it is a fear of failure. We tend to lose out by thinking what's going to make things different this time. **By doing so we can live in the bondage of our past failures.**

With this plateau mentality, we will never reach the level of spiritual maturity that God is preparing us for and requiring of us. We cannot allow our past to hinder our future. We must strive for a **new paradigm** to pattern our lives after. The Webster's Dictionary describes the word "*paradigm*" as "*model, example.*"

*** For many years Monterey, a California coast town, was a pelican's paradise. As the fishermen cleaned their fish, they flung the remains to the pelicans. The birds grew fat, lazy, and contented.

Eventually, however the remains were utilized, and there were no longer snacks for the pelicans. When the change came the pelicans made no effort to fish for themselves. They waited around and grew gaunt and thin. Many starved to death. They had forgotten how to fish for themselves.

The problem was solved by importing new pelicans from the south, birds accustomed to foraging for themselves. They were placed among their starving cousins, and the newcomers immediately started catching fish. Before long, the hungry pelicans followed suit, and the famine was ended. ***

Bits and Pieces, June 23, 1994, p. 17

How Can We Set a New Paradigm for Our Lives?

I. BEGIN WITH A TIME OF RESOLUTION (18:1-3)

II. MATURE TO A STAGE OF RESTORATION (18:4b)

III. LIVE IN AN ATMOSPHERE OF RELATIONSHIP (18:4a)

I. BEGIN WITH A TIME OF RESOLUTION (18:1-3)

Before we can set a new paradigm for our spiritual lives, we must be convinced in our hearts about what changes we are going to commit ourselves to. What's the use of making plans for our future if they are so vague that no one can hold us accountable to them? Make them reachable and meaningful. If they don't cost something, they probably aren't worth anything.

I have found that people often misquote a certain portion of Scripture which has become a link for them not to deal with their past actions/words/thoughts etc. These following verses were given in their entirety by Moses as he spoke to the children of Israel at the foot of Mount Sinai or Mount Horeb [meaning "*drought or desolation*"].

God brought the people from Egypt to this desolate place in order to begin a **Time of Resolution**. This was not a coincidence. It is often during the dry times in our lives that God chooses to bring about resolutions that we must remain true to.

We know it today as the time when Moses gave the people the Ten Commandments. These commandments are still in full effect today. I find it interesting that the third commandment is often misquoted and taken out of context.

"You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below

*5. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing hate children for the sins of the fathers to the third and fourth generation **of those who hate me,***

6. But showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments."

Exodus 20:4-6

For years in the land of Israel, the people followed a pattern of making excuses for their actions deceiving themselves and thinking they weren't going to be held accountable. They blamed their current actions upon their father's and forefathers based upon a misquoted proverb. They tried to lightly pass off their disobedience as a learned behaviour. In doing so they never made a resolution to change from their past habits.

I. BEGIN WITH A TIME OF RESOLUTION (18:1-3) (Contd.)

“The father’s eat sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge.

3. As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, you will no longer quote this proverb in Israel.”

Ezekiel 18:2,3

A time of resolution is useless if there is any part of it that contains deception. It must be based upon a true repentance – not just tears. Our heart must be willing to make the necessary changes with God’s help. We cannot blame others for our failures.

God wanted the nation of Israel to come to grips with their past patterns. They had reached too many plateaus instead of striving for new paradigms of accountability. If they chose not to take these things seriously, they would continue to live their spiritual lives in a place of drought and desolation.

This same thing applies to our city. What we are witnessing in the natural is also being played out in the spiritual realm. Let me explain. Our city is strategically located. We are built upon the greatest fresh water river in the nation. We are linked to major cities through a railway, 401 hwy and hwy 138 which links to the hwy 417. We have an international bridge linking us to the United States. We have some of the lowest taxes in the region as well as the lowest hydro rates. The Saunders Power dam generates much of the power needed in this area. We have a host of amenities. Yet we were recently regarded as the city with highest level of unemployment and welfare recipients per capita in all of Ontario. We also are seeing a rise in our senior citizens because our young people and families are moving elsewhere to find jobs that pay over the minimum wage of \$14.00 per hour.

Our spiritual condition is amazingly similar. There is no evangelical church in this city that sees a regular Sunday morning attendance of over 350 in spite of the fact that they have been in this city anywhere from 75 years to 150 years. New Life Covenant had to close their doors because the congregation dropped to less than 40 from 250. We’ve had a higher rate of turnover in our local pastors – few make it past 10 years. We have a high rate of lawlessness (smuggling/B & E/sexual assaults). Marriages are feeling the attack. Most churches are facing financial difficulties. Others are constantly dealing with insurrections/divisions just as things begin to take off.

Isn’t it interesting that we now host the yearly Jehovah Witness Conventions as well as Psychic Fairs at our local Civic Complex? Anyone who has tried to do anything for the Lord in that area has faced a considerable amount of opposition or seen little results. It is time to make a resolution to bring about changes that will impact our entire city not just our individual churches. We can’t make excuses for past failures. Most cities that have what we’ve been given are seeing much better results. We have a spiritual problem that must be addressed.

I. BEGIN WITH A TIME OF RESOLUTION (18:1-3) (Contd.)

I believe its time to stop and begin a new paradigm of Godly resolutions. Not easy resolutions but rather **Godly resolutions**. Some people need to put strict controls on their TV time and selections. Others need to curtail their spending habits so they can begin to faithfully give to the work of the Lord. Still others need to begin to discipline their children so they don't end up like Eli's sons. Some must begin to show love and affection to those they are closest to. There are few that need to stop wasting the precious resource of time that God has granted them.

II. MATURE TO A STAGE OF RESTORATION (18:4b)

Not only do we need to accept the fact that godly resolutions are required but also that we must enter into a **Stage of Restoration**. A resolution can be made in a short moment while a restoration is something that often takes place in stages. I have seldom heard of anyone who is restored overnight. **Hurt and painful memories run deep into our soul and requires not just time but also important changes to take place.** It takes times of refreshing to remove/cleanse and replace the damage that has been left.

“Our lives are fields that primarily contain weeds. We cannot produce strawberries. We can mow the weeds, but that effort alone will never produce acceptable fruit. If we really want that fruit, we will have to go deeper. We must plow up the whole field and start again with new plants.”

Christian Theology in Plain Language
p. 59

We must move beyond the stage of repeating our past mistakes. Doing something is important but **doing the right things are even more important.** I've heard people say, “*Well at least I'm doing something.*” That is usually a cop out to avoid doing what should be done. Resolutions are only good if we keep to them. God will bring us to a place of justice if we don't seriously deal with issues. **God judges according to individual conduct.**

“The soul who sins is the one who will die.”

Ezekiel 18:4b

The children of Israel were complaining to God that He was unjust because they were suffering for their father's past sins. With a strong oath from the Lord, Ezekiel made it clear that the practise of quoting the proverb must stop immediately because it was implying that God was unjust in his dealing with sin. Ezekiel (as directed by God) proclaimed that they were far from being innocent. They were simply repeating their father's actions. Therefore, they were responsible for THEIR OWN actions.

I. MATURE TO A STAGE OF RESTORATION (18:4b) (Contd.)

They had a choice to live a life of restoration. It meant being responsible for their own attitudes and actions. It also meant that if they were serious about changes, their past would take on a new dimension. God loves reshaping our lives into something beautiful.

**He is not just a creator but He is also a re-creator;
He is not just a moulder but He is a re-moulder;
He is not just a maker but He is a re-maker;
He is not just one who stores but He also restores.**

By His sovereign grace, God can bring good out of our failures, and even out of our sins. J. Stuart Holden tells of an old Scottish mansion close to where he had his little summer home.

*** The walls of one room were filled with sketches made by distinguished artists. The practice began after a pitcher of soda water was accidentally spilled on a freshly decorated wall and left an unsightly stain.

At the time, a noted artist, Lord Landseer, was a guest in the house. One day when the family went out to the moors, he stayed behind. With a few masterful strokes of a piece of charcoal, that ugly spot became the outline of a beautiful waterfall, bordered by trees and wildlife. He turned that disfigured wall into one of his most successful depictions of Highland life. ***

Source Unknown

III. LIVE IN AN ATMOSPHERE OF RELATIONSHIP (18:4a)

A. With God

The final thing that I wish to address today is the vital importance of living a restored life in an **Atmosphere of Relationship**. The first one that needs to take place is with our heavenly Father. We must recognize that we are His sons and daughters.

“For every living soul belongs to me, the father as well as the son – both alike belong to me.”

Ezekiel 1:4a

III. LIVE IN AN ATMOSPHERE OF RELATIONSHIP (18:4a) (Contd.)

A. With God (Contd.)

Whether we acknowledge the fact of our sonship or not, God is still our heavenly Father. Just because a son runs away from home does not mean that he no longer bears the family name. Some may choose to disown those who fail, but God waits until the final moment to bring about His separation from a soul that has wandered away. He does everything He can to build a relationship with those who choose to change.

God built a relationship with **Jacob** even though he deceived his brother of his birthright. God built a relationship with **Moses** even though he murdered a man. God built a relationship with **Jonah** even though he ran from God's will. God built a relationship with **David** even though he caused a man to be killed and had an adulterous affair with the man's wife. God built a relationship with **Peter** even though he denied that he even knew the LORD. God built a relationship with **Saul/Paul** even though he was responsible for the death and imprisonment of many Christians. God will build a relationship with anyone who chooses to accept Him.

B. With Others

There is an important factor that links together a successful paradigm shift. It becomes clear when we find the right place for ourselves in any relationship.

Most Important Words for Getting Along With People

The SIX most important words: *"I admit I made a mistake."*

The FIVE most important words: *"You did a good job."*

The FOUR most important words: *"What do you think?"*

The THREE most important words: *"After you, please."*

The TWO most important words: *"Thank you."*

The ONE most important word: *"We"*

The LEAST important word: **"I"**

Source Unknown

"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others greater than yourselves.

4. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interest of others.

5. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus . . ."

Philippians 2:3-5

III. LIVE IN AN ATMOSPHERE OF RELATIONSHIP (18:4a) (Contd.)

A. With Others (Contd.)

“So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you.”

Matthew 7:12

It is not easy making and maintaining relationships. Yet this is what God will use to further the process of creating new paradigms in our lives. God never said it would be easy.

In a “Peanuts” cartoon, Lucy says to Snoopy: *“There are times when you really bug me. But I must admit that there are also times when I feel like giving you a big hug.”*

Snoopy replies, *“That’s the way I am . . . huggable and buggable.”*

Robert L. Short,
“Parables of Peanuts”
Quoted by Charles Swindoll
“The Tale of the Tardy Oxcart,” p. 477

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Date: Jan 7/18

Place: FCA

Time: 10:30Am

Song: Change my Heart O God - C; Take me In (Take me past the Outer Courts) Em

GOOD RESOLUTIONS

Resolved, That I will do whatsoever I think to be most to the glory of God, and my own good, profit, and pleasure, in the whole of my duration; without any consideration of the time, whether now, or never so many myriads of ages hence.

Resolved, to do whatever I think to be my duty, and most for the good and advantage of mankind in general.

Resolved, never to lose one moment of time, but to improve it in the most profitable way I possibly can.

Resolved, to live with all my might, while I do live.

Resolved, never to do any thing, which I should be afraid to do if it were the last hour of my life.

Resolved, Never to speak evil of anyone, so that it shall tend to his dishonour, more or less, upon no account except for some real good.

Resolved, To study the Scriptures so steadily, constantly, and frequently, as that I may find, and plainly perceive, myself to grow in the knowledge of the same.

Charles Swindoll
Quoted in "*Sanctity of Life*"
Word, 1990, pp. 90-91

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A. With God - Ezekiel 1:4a

B. With Others - Philippians 2:3-5; Matthew 7:12