

THOUGHTS

BY DOUGLAS W. SCHROEDER
SPEAKER ON THE WORD TODAY

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"YOU HAVEN'T CHANGED!"

Why do we say that when we haven't seen someone in a long time? A recent event brought together several persons that I had not seen in 30 years, and everyone was saying to me, "You haven't changed," and "You still look the same!" I hope not, as I am much better looking now! Of course, that is not true as my wrinkles and sagging cheeks belie the claim. We wish we still looked the same – unless we were in much rougher shape a long time ago! If only we didn't change for the worse, that is, older and less robust.

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Why not say, "You've changed so much!" We all want to change for the better, so why not acknowledge that people are trying? Chiefly, I believe it is a tacit acknowledgment that we are moving toward death and wish to deny that fact. The social lie that we have not changed denies the inevitability of aging and death and infers we have not been marching toward them.

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It is also strange that we look at the outward appearance yet proclaim that the person has not changed. What about maturing, growing in grace, learning patience and forbearance, and moderating our excesses? Have we not conformed at least a bit to be more like Christ? In a moment it is proclaimed that we have not changed. It would seem odd, though, were we to take offense and chide, "What do you mean, I haven't changed?"

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We want people to stay as they were because we want to stay as we were, not 30 years older. It is a form of denial. Wouldn't it be better if we handled it realistically and said something like, "You've changed so much and so have I! I'm eager to hear what has happened..."

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A recent witticism in Reader's Digest – it hasn't changed in all these years! – suggested the phrase, "With all due respect," often precedes a disrespectful comment! For many, that would be the ultimate insult, "With all due respect, you've changed a lot!" We keep telling social lies because they make us feel better.

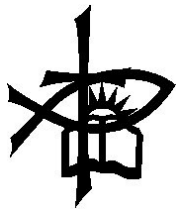
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BRAVING THE UNKNOWN FOR THE GOSPEL

As I review the travels of the Apostle Paul recorded in the book of Acts, I am struck by the determination of the man to spread the Gospel. As someone who came to faith in Jesus as an adult after a dramatic confrontation by the Savior, he was compelled to preach in the aftermath of his own salvation (see Acts 9:1-19). The list of harrowing experiences he had make extreme sports enthusiasts look soft. As he defended his ministry against spiritual detractors, he recounted what he had suffered for the sake of the Gospel, including being flogged, stoned, shipwrecked, and in danger from people seeking to kill him (see 2 Corinthians 11:23-33).

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*The Bible is God's Word...Jesus is God's "Word" made flesh...
His death and resurrection, the message needed Today.*

September

Paul pushed himself relentlessly as he traveled and preached. Generations of pastors, missionaries, and laypersons have been inspired by Paul's drive to evangelize the world.

The Gospel is not about having a comfy life. Jesus calls us to challenges and trials for His name's sake. We are to stand and confess Him before others. We are to go out of our way to serve others. We are ambassadors, representatives of Jesus who are out of place as though living in a foreign country, "We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making His appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:20-21)."

My sinful nature tends to shy away from possible confrontation. I do not like standing out such that others would mock me. Yet, I know that Jesus calls me to stand with Him, to oppose wickedness and profess His name. I don't want to be a wuss for Jesus. Who has been moved to give their life to the Savior by hesitancy and lack of boldness for Christ? People commit when they see someone on fire, sold out for their cause.

One of the reasons I make Christian T-shirt designs is because I feel the need to make my witness overt. The world is full of obnoxious, ungodly advertisements and messages such that the disciple's sensibilities are offended often. Why not counter some of that ungodliness? Why not be the source of something beautiful and spiritually uplifting? I feel a need to do something positive, to act on a godly impulse versus complaining about the world's state.

When we give ourselves to the Lord to be used by Him to represent Jesus, we open new adventures. Those adventures may take us places and have us doing things that are new, and unfamiliar to us. Our sinful nature will attempt to sandbag us to shy away from such things. Some of the most amazing experiences of my life have occurred as direct and indirect results of purposely trying things for the sake of the Gospel. Why not pray it over, seek the Spirit's direction, and jump in and try? Someone will see your zeal and will be more likely to consider Jesus!

DESPERATE FOR ATTENTION

Gender reveals, gender identity, trans-whatever. People are desperate to find themselves. The believer in Jesus knows who they are, a child loved by God who has been made in God's image as male or female, forgiven, redeemed through Christ, and looking forward to eternal life! We don't have to parade our sexuality, nor desperately cling to this world. We have clear-eyed confidence and hope. We are stable through faith.

Blessings,
Douglas W. Schroeder