

The Baby and the Bath Water

By Steve Ely

New. Everyone wants what is new. We want the newest gadgets, the newest clothes, the newest cars, and the newest church system and move of God. There is nothing inherently wrong in wanting what is new, fresh, and different. However, this constant struggle to embrace the latest thing has brought about tension as the younger generation tends to push forward at a breakneck pace while the older generation tends to hold on to what once was. Unfortunately, this tension continues to grow and fester until it seems that we have come to an impasse that cannot be solved. The young generation seems to be so bent on moving into new territory and arenas that they are willing to throw away the proverbial baby with the bath water, while the older generation seems to be set on mourning over the bath water that was once clean and once warm. It is my position that neither position is correct or healthy.

The questions must be asked. How do we gain balance and embrace new without discounting and discarding old? How do we deal with the new without destroying the old? It is apparent throughout church history that the old move attacks and doesn't trust the new move, while the new move despises, distances, and discounts the old. While possibly making the error of generalization, I believe you could easily state that there are some characteristics that can be attributed to each move:

Characteristics of old: Protective, territorial, paranoid, restrictive, domineering, controlling, cynical, system and structure is most important, change is a slow process, rigid, values conformity.

Characteristics of new: Generalizations, moves beyond geographical and structural boundaries, tendency toward rebellion, leery of old leaders, accusatory in nature, tendency to forget good of the old and focuses on problems and negative, defensive, isolationism, new insight and personal relationship are most important, changes quickly, fluid, despises conformity.

While these lists of characteristics are not comprehensive, they do afford a glimpse into the wide divide that exists between the two groups. It is important to note that these groups are not categorically divided by age brackets. The old and new described is a mindset issue more than age issue although at times, age does come into play. There must be a way to connect the two in a way that takes advantage of the structure and stability of the old while moving forward into the new territory gained by the new. Some would say this is impossible. I refuse to accept that belief. I believe that this will take balance. Many in the new move would say that balance is a bad thing. However, I am thankful for balance. I am thankful that the earth balances properly on its axis. I am thankful that there is the correct balance of hydrogen to oxygen so as to provide water. I am thankful for balance in my checkbook. I am thankful for the smooth ride that the balanced wheels on my vehicle provides. Balance in my mind does not equal mediocrity

or compromise. Balance determines breadth. Without balance you either become marginalized as a radical or heretic or you become traditionalized and a relic.

Two scriptural accounts give a road map to having this balance. The account of Samuel and Abraham teach us that new territories can be procured and new systems can be established. However, they also teach us that what came before has merit.

Samuel was the new. He was the initiation into a new system. No longer would perverted and promiscuous priests rule the nation. Samuel was to be a prophetic voice to give direction and guidance to the nation of Israel. However, as a young boy Samuel was not only placed in a dysfunctional system, he prospered there. It was in the midst of the inappropriate, ineffective, incapable, and restrictive system that Samuel learned to hear the voice of God. The very young man that was born to change the system and usher the people into the new was placed in the old. He stayed in the old, grew in the old, and ultimately birthed change into the old. My question is where is the new that will be raised in the very institution that needs transformation? Where is the new that will remain in the old while learning and maturing in order to usher in the new? Did Samuel speak out against the old? Yes. Absolutely. Did he see the things that were wrong with the old? Most assuredly. Did he quit the old? Start something of his own? Ridicule that which had gone before him? No. No. And no. He learned to live in the old while holding on to the new and he knew how to point out what was wrong without driving a wedge between himself and the previous generation. This is important because the old, the previous move which is represented by Eli, also played a huge part in this process.

Eli, as ineffective as he was as a father, must have had some spiritual insight and discernment. Eli realized there were problems. He heard the judgment as it was spoken by the new. Although he was a part of what had to be judged, he played a key role in the emergence of the new. It was the old that taught Samuel how to hear God's voice. Eli teaches us that the old cannot mourn so deeply for what is passing away that we miss or attack what God is bringing to birth.

The second account that helps us deal with bringing balance is the account of Abraham. It seems that when dealing with Abraham's story one always jumps directly to Abraham's response to the call to go to Canaan. However, In Genesis 11:31 a key player in this faith filled journey is often overlooked. Genesis 11 gives us the account of Abraham's father, Terah. Perhaps, Terah received the first call to leave Ur and make his way to Canaan? Perhaps, it was the father who received the call before the son? There is no definite information given. However, what is definite is that Terah gathers his family Abram, Sarai, and Lot and leaves everything behind to begin a journey to Canaan. The father was on the way to the Promised Land. When Terah reached Haran, he pitched his tent and stayed there until he died. When Terah left Ur, he set out on a journey to Canaan which was 1000 miles away. However, 500 miles into the trip he stops and establishes a home for himself. Abraham, the new, stayed with him. Abraham did not pack his bags; throw a fit, and voice accusations about settling for less. He didn't belittle the journey his father had taken. No, he made his father's land his land. He stayed with his father and

according to Genesis 12, became fruitful and expanded the kingdom while living in his father's land.

I believe a very crucial element in being able to remain balanced is that sons must understand that fathers have brought them 500 miles. That is 500 miles further than they would have gotten without the help, perseverance, and vision of the old. The sons are further now than they would have been if they had not had fathers who were willing to leave the comfortable place and start on this journey. The new doesn't give the old the credit they deserve.

Much of the new has ridden the hard work, the prayer life, and the battles that the old have fought. Then the new wants to stomp and pout when the old hasn't gone as far as the new thinks they should have gone. But Abraham stayed by his father.

I believe it is time for the new to tout the old pioneers. I hear the new criticizing and critiquing the old, but I just don't hear the new giving credit to those who paved the way. It is time for the new to go back and thank J.A. Culbreth, G.F. Taylor, Paul F. Beacham, J.A. Synan, J.H. King, J. Floyd Williams, Cliff Turpin, Jesse Simmons, B.E. Underwood, Leon Stewart, and Dr. David Hopkins for the foundation. It is time to recognize and celebrate the heritage that they established through blood, sweat, and tears. Perhaps while looking toward what is out there in the distance the assumption is made that the old settled for less or stopped short of the promise, but we would still be back there somewhere except for the trip that the old started.

Yet, the account is about balance. Abraham also teaches us that the son stayed but didn't settle. He didn't settle for his father's land. He inhabited his father's land. He prospered in his father's land. He grew in his father's land. But he did not settle in his father's land. The new must learn to inhabit and prosper in the old system, however, that doesn't mean that the new has to be of the system. The new must continue to refuse to settle short of the promise. The new must continue to celebrate the past while pressing toward the future. Respect, celebrate, and then move.

So how do the old and the new coexist? I believe they can coexist if the following takes place:

1. The new stays in the institution and brings transition from the inside out.
2. The new learns to hear God in the midst of dysfunction and to communicate without breaking relationship.
3. The new honors, respects, and celebrates the old. This includes honoring the old's territory.
4. The new constantly keeps pushing toward new territory and expanding the boundaries.
5. The old must not mourn what is being lost to the point that the new is forfeited or frustrated.
6. The old must bless the new. The new needs to have the blessing of the old.
The new can not go in power unless sent by the old.
7. The old must enable the new to emerge.

8. The old must cheer on the new.
9. The old must release the new from their land so that they can go and find THE LAND!
10. Old and new must strive to maintain healthy relationship with each other so that an open dialogue is encouraged.

What good is bath water without a baby? The water no longer has a purpose. Likewise, what good is a baby with no bath water? The baby begins to stink. Without one the picture is incomplete and lacking. The old inhabits, the new inherits and then invades. The new then becomes the old and inhabits and the cycle repeats itself. This cycle must continue in order for the kingdom of God to advance. Recognizing and understanding this cycle ultimately reveals the importance of the law of sowing and reaping (Saul and David's account speaks to this principle). The old statement, "What goes around comes around" is a paramount principle to remember when one is intent on trying to clutch to only to the baby or only to the bath water.