

Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

Sundays @ 10:00 a.m. Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc www.dtminc.org Today's Date: June 29, 2008

Whenever You Come Together...

by Dan Trygg

“What is the outcome then, brethren? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.”
I Corinthians 14:26

The pattern for meeting together that Paul is describing in this verse is dramatically different than what is typical in most established churches around the world today. Most believers come together expecting to be taught, or at least led by someone else, during the meeting. Paul is suggesting exactly the opposite here. He is suggesting that **when the believers come together that they should come together as active participants**, each with some component to add to the recipe for their meeting that day. Everyone comes as a priest, as an active functionary for God to the people. **The goal of the meeting is to "build up", to strengthen and encourage one another as individuals, as well as to assemble and strengthen the parts into a corporate, interactive whole.** This cannot happen unless all the parts are given an opportunity to express their gifts, and to reach out to one another in real, meaningful ways. A Body cannot become an interactive organism, such as the apostle described in chapters 12 and 13, unless the members *act* in relation to one another.

I find it interesting that **the NT model for meeting is horizontally focused**, i.e., believers met primarily to encourage and interact *with one another*. **Often the emphasis in modern church services is vertical**, i.e., we are there to "serve God" with our praise, worship and giving, but interaction with one another is noticeably absent. I think the NT emphasis reflects the fact that the duty Jesus laid upon the disciples, which was foremost in their minds, was to "make disciples". **God desires more that we would take seriously His priority of developing people, than in singing to His glory.** There will be all eternity available for that, while we have only a limited time here. That is not to say that we ought disregard worship, rather that we ought to put it in its proper place. In a very poignant moment in Biblical history, the prophet declared to a disobedient king that God desired obedience, not sacrifice (I Sam. 15:1-22). Like king Saul, **we have made a great show of our devotion to God in certain externals, but we have not carried out the primary mission He has given us to accomplish.** What good are our sacrifices, or our praises, if they only serve to deceive us into thinking we have done our duty, when, in truth, we have ignored carrying out the express command of our heavenly King?

What is it that God wants from the church? Mature, obedient followers of Jesus Christ. He wants us to develop our spiritual muscle, our gifts and abilities. He wants us to learn to be discerning. The way we typically do church, unless supplemented by other "extra-curricular" meetings for the "truly committed", allows us to remain babes, ...spoon-fed and leader-led, our diet consisting of pre-digested slurry fit for infants. No matter how insightful the teacher may be, solid food comes only to those who have grown up, to those who "by reason of use have trained their faculties to discern good and evil" (Heb. 5:14). **Maturity comes not from eating, alone. Maturity comes from doing**, from experimenting and developing skills, from taking on additional responsibility, from stepping out into adult-like behaviors, and fine-tuning one's skills. **God wants an army of soldiers, a nation of responsible, discerning adults, not a mass of infants overseen by babysitters.** He wants us to do more than merely *talk* and *sing* about how wonderful He is, ...He wants us to grow up!

By embracing a formula for church that relies heavily on the output of a few, and allows the vast majority to be spectators, we have unwittingly undermined the entire Kingdom enterprise. We have encouraged laziness, feelings of inadequacy, fear, softness, naiveté, and self-centeredness. Instead, **we should be rearing responsible, industrious, confident, fearless, tough, savvy, and service-oriented people, ...men and women who take initiative and ownership in the King's business, ...ones who press in to see what they need to do, and will problem-solve, adapt and persevere until it is accomplished.**

Since growing up spiritually is about learning and sharpening new skills, ...discovering by experimentation what the will of God is, and how to be discerning..., **it should not surprise us to find that the Christian gathering was to be more of a learning laboratory than a classroom.** It is meant to follow a more participatory, "hands on" approach, like industrial arts and home economics, than a strictly academic, "in your head", style of learning. **Mastery comes by doing, not by mere thinking or imagining.** Without the benefit of actually doing it, we cannot truly be prepared for the real thing. Imagination can only take us so far. No one can

really be prepared for the experience of actually getting in the water, when learning to swim. Theory, video or dry-land exercises do not fully equip a person to successfully and skillfully swim. The actual feel of the water, the effect of buoyancy, resistance, and fluid mechanics, must be *felt* and *adapted to* by practice. In the same way, classroom driver's training cannot take the place of actual driving time in a car. Theory, testimony, and video cannot fully prepare the person for the multiple variables that await them when actually getting behind the wheel.

So, what skills are we supposed to be learning when we come to church? They fall into two categories: (1.) People-serving skills; and (2.) Spirit-response skills. It is obvious that we are to learn to interact, to love, share-with, and serve one another. These are skills we can learn in relation to one another that will not only develop and stretch us as individuals, they will equip us for our larger mission to the world around us. **Our people-serving skills train us to listen attentively, to develop a "bedside manner", to learn to reach out in caring ways,** etc. **The Spirit-response skills are about learning to discover how the Holy Spirit leads us.** By *taking risks* in a supportive, interactive environment, *we begin to discern* and develop our ability to detect His leading. *We can get pointers from one another's experiences and example.* By acting on the inner promptings we may feel, we move beyond the "world of imagination" to experience what happens when we "get behind the wheel", or "slip into the water". **We learn to discern how to interpret and respond to the inner awareness of God's nudging in our lives.** We also strengthen our ability to effectively express those leadings, as we evaluate our halting, clumsy, first attempts and are able to incorporate any insights gained into our "tool bag" for future opportunities. **If God is, indeed, desiring to move us toward maturity, we can expect that He will be prompting us to step out in these areas.** He will "show up" to give us practice, because He wants to develop us.

What does the verse actually say? Are there any hidden insights from the Greek? Let's take a closer look.

"Therefore, what is it, brothers?" -- Obviously, this little sentence indicates that Paul was bringing together a conclusion to his argument. How far back does this go? **The whole subject of their "coming together" began to be discussed way back in chapter 11,** when Paul began to confront how they did not wait for one another to share in their potluck *agapē* feast (The same verb for "coming together" is used in 11:17,18,20,33, and 34 as is used in 14:26.). Certainly, the discussion in chapter 12 about the various spiritual gifts, and how each has a different and valuable function, is quite clearly a part of Paul's thinking here in this verse. The message of chapter 13, concerning love, is the filling of this "spiritual gift sandwich". Its placement between two chapters dealing with spiritual gifts in Body life, anchors its message and application solidly into **the main themes that Paul has been addressing throughout, namely, "be considerate of others", and "don't insist on your own way, but make room for the needs and gifts of others".** The discussion of the first half of chapter 14, concerning the use of tongues versus prophecy, focuses *even more* on evaluating what we do in light of whether or not it would benefit others. Building up or edifying others is more important than my personal pleasure or enjoyment. **If we expand the concept of "building up" to include not only individual encouragement and strengthening, but also establishing stronger relationship ties in the Body, then we can see more clearly why it is important to consider the feelings of others, and to make them feel a part of things.** All of these background thoughts are part of what prompts the recommendations that Paul is about to make that were necessary to guide the Corinthians in healthy, productive interaction.

"Whenever y'all might come together" -- The structure of the Greek is very open-ended, very inclusive, describing an ongoing or repeated possibility. Another translation might be, "*as often as you meet together*". The verb also communicates the idea that we all are *jointly* coming together. **No one person is the center of attention that we come to see or hear. The gathering itself is the focus. It is what happens when we meet together that Paul want us to focus on.** A word picture that may help is that all of us are moving from the outer part of the circle, in toward the middle. No one is in the middle until we all jointly come. We are not gathering "at the feet of" some person, we are coming together jointly from every direction, meeting in the middle at the same place and at the same time. It is the meeting together, and what happens there, that is the focus.

"Each one has..." -- **The clear message is that we all as individuals have something to offer.** While the previous verb was an *indefinite possibility*, this verb, repeated five times, is a *statement of fact*. **Every person does have, or possess, some ingredient to bring to the gathered group.** He lists some suggested ways in which we might share something with the Body. Note the variety of forms, yet all of it is communication with others.

"Let all things come to be towards edification" -- **The focus of every activity should be to build us up, individually and corporately,** ...literally to "home build". Inherent in this word are all the images of construction (assembling parts, setting them in place, binding them together with cement or nails, etc.), along with the tender, warm images of a family, a household.