

Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

Sundays @ 10:00 a.m. Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc dantrygg@msn.com Today's Date: August 3, 2008

Getting Your Roots Down Into God's Word

"Then this shall be a sign for you: you shall eat this year what grows of itself, in the second year what springs from the same, and in the third year sow, reap, plant vineyards, and eat their fruit. And the surviving remnant of the house of Judah shall again take root downward and bear fruit upward."

Isaiah 37:30,31

"Happy are those who do not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers, but their delight is in the law of Yahweh, and in His law they meditate day and night. They are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither. And all which they do, they cause to prosper."

Psalms 1:1-3

The Bible has much to say about the value of God's word. It is the message that informs, instigates, and activates faith (Rom. 10:13-17; II Tim. 3:14,15). It is the seed which God uses to conceive our spiritual birth (I Pet. 1:23; Jas. 1:18). It is likened to spiritual milk, which is to nourish and sustain us in the early stages of our spiritual growth (I Pet. 2:2; Heb. 5:11-14). It is described as a special "God-breathed" resource, a trustworthy and beneficial guide to help us grow to maturity and full equipment for service (Isa. 40:8; Jn. 10:35; Matt. 5:17,18; 24:35; II Tim. 3:16,17). It is a reliable touchstone for truth that we can use to help us both in the renewal of our minds, and also in discerning what is real (Jn. 17:17; Psa. 119:160; Rom. 12:2; Eph. 4:20-24). Specifically, it is a light to guide us in following God (Psa. 119:105). It encourages, instructs and revitalizes our faith (Rom. 15:4; Psa. 119:98-100,104,130; Psa. 119:25,50,93,107,116,149,154,156). It produces reverence for God (Psa. 119:38; Dt. 4:9,10; 6:1,2), and its insights can establish us in peace (Psa. 119:165; Isa. 26:3; 48:17,18). Altogether, **it is a treasure, with great benefits**, which we should rejoice in (Psa. 119:162; Psa. 19:7-11). God has granted to us this resource of "precious and magnificent promises" so that we might become sharers of His nature, and we might escape the corruption of this present world (II Pet. 1:3,4).

Jesus also had said that ***if we would continue in His word, then we would truly be disciples of His, and we would come to know the truth, and the truth would liberate us*** from bondage to sin (Jn. 8:31-36). Moreover, He clearly stated that He did not come to abolish any of the OT law. ***None of it was to be considered irrelevant.*** Not a letter, or the distinguishing marks between letters would pass away, until all things were accomplished (Mt. 5:17-20), ...pretty clear language upholding the value of the OT revelation. Certainly Jesus' own teachings were steeped in OT background. He definitely had studied diligently the Torah. In fact, His opponents were amazed at His grasp of it, and marveled that He had not been educated in one of the rabbinic schools of the day (Jn. 7:14-17). As is typical of Jesus' ministry among a religious people, however, **Jesus pointed beyond the mere outward disciplines of learning to an inner relationship with His Father.** It was this relationship that gave Him the *understanding* to perceive the meaning and application of the Scriptures more deeply. Later on, when the apostles demonstrated this same kind of understanding and boldness, even though they were untrained and uneducated men, the religious leaders could recognize the same dynamic and concluded that they had "been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13).

Jesus was not into study for study's sake, or into learning by rote just to demonstrate mastery of content. **Jesus' eye and heart were always after discerning reality, coming to know the truth.** In the pursuit of truth, and in the pursuit of an understanding of God and His plan and general purposes, the scriptures are a revelation (an "uncovering") of things that otherwise would not be easily discernible. They are a record of God's actions and communications with us that He has provided for us as a guide to reality, as well as an invitation into relationship with Him. **Because the particular writings that have been collected and preserved in our Bibles were uniquely inspired by God (II Tim. 3:16,17), they are a safe and reliable resource for these purposes.** Thus, Jesus could pray to His Father, "Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth" (Jn. 17:17). What does not come across in the English here is that Jesus is *not* equivocating the scriptures to *all* of truth. Instead, He was stating that what is there in scripture *is* truth, i.e., it is safe and reliable, unmixed with error. However, there is a whole lot more out there that is truth than what the written revelation of God contains. **The Bible is to be a resource, guide and touchstone to help us discern truth from deception as we navigate through life**, but reality is much more broad and expansive than what could be written in the pages of any book. Actually, what Jesus is implying in this prayer is that we will be sanctified (*set apart from* what is typical in this world system; *consecrated for* God's unique purposes) by the discovery of the larger truth, the broader grasp of reality, of which the scriptures are like a window or a reliable

general map. There is a whole lot more detail to be discovered than what the Bible speaks of; but *where it does speak, it is accurate.*

Getting back to John 8:31, **what Jesus was advocating by "if you continue in My word" was more than just Bible study.** The Greek word translated as "continue in" is the same as "abide" in Jn. 15:1-17. It means much more than simply to study. **It is talking about "living in, staying in, remaining in, and dwelling in" His word. It refers to a *habitual residing*. It is the place we go out from, and the place we return to.** This is referring to both creating an inner mindset of pondering, examining, testing and comparing with what we know is true, as well as to cultivate an "ever-ready to apply" attitude toward living out His will in life situations. Keeping an open eye of awareness to the "roadmap", as well as an open eye of awareness to one's surroundings with a "willing to do His will" kind of heart (Jn. 7:17), will help us to become effective followers of the Master.

Of course, part of this process is orienteering, learning to be good map-readers. In other words, if the "map" is really *meant* to communicate something, then there must be a key or legend to use to correctly understand the map, so that what the map-maker had in mind becomes clear to the person using the map. This is what Paul is talking about in II Tim. 2:15. **Learning to "handle accurately the word of truth" implies that there is an underlying, objective, intended meaning to the communication.** The degree to which a reader correctly understands this meaning is measurable. **The reader's perception is more or less accurate, based upon how closely he or she grasps what was intended.** In Neh. 8:7,8 we see that certain people "explained the law to the congregation, ...interpreting to give the sense so that they understood the meaning". **Part of becoming mature discerners of truth will include gaining the ability to correctly interpret the meaning of the scriptures in their context.** Without this skill, we would be like people attempting to follow a map without understanding the symbols used by the map-maker to depict the reality of the lay of the land being described.

There is yet another piece to this entire subject area. **God's word is not limited to the written form.** God is alive. **He still speaks, and He wants to speak to us.** We have entered into relationship with Him, and contemporaneous communication is a big part of that relationship. Going back to the map illustration, if you could imagine going down the road following the map, noticing the landmarks, etc., and then God, who is in the front seat next to you, says, "Turn off here. I want to show you something not on your map." Or, "Let's stop there for lunch." Or, "I would like you to pull over here. I have a job for you to do." Furthermore, if you could eavesdrop on the car of the Christian behind you, you would find that God (who is in the front seat of *their* car, as well) is showing them different sites, and giving them different things to do. In addition, as you turn off at the exit, you see your Christian buddy ahead of you continue on their way without you, because they were not instructed to go where you are going, either. If you stop and think about this phenomenon, you realize that, if a relationship with God really were possible, such spontaneous and individual interactions with Him should be *expected*.

Biblically, this idea is supported by the usage of two different Greek words for "word", in reference to God's word. The general word, referring more to "the message", the objective communication from God to everyone, akin to the "roadmap", is **logos**. The other Greek word, **rhēma**, is used to describe a more personal word, a specific directive from God *to you*. This is not for everyone; it is for *you*. It tends to be *specific to you* as a person, or to the time and place opportunity. It is not a "forever-and-for-always-for-everyone" kind of thing. To interpret it that way would be wrong, and could be misleading, or even abusive, to others. Sometimes, God will even use a scripture verse to communicate a specific **rhēma** word to you. He will use the language of the verse to suggest something *else*, something *other than* the actual interpretation of the verse. This is the difference between what some theologians would call "illumination" (the **rhēma** message) and "interpretation" (the **logos** meaning). It is important to see that the **rhēma** is *not transferable* to everyone, ...nor is it a secret "hidden key of interpretation" to be used in every similar verse. If it is a **rhēma** communication from God, it is *for you* as an individual, or for that specific circumstance. Again, using the map analogy, just because God tells you to go to lunch at a Mexican restaurant at a specific exit on one trip does not mean that you always have to stop for lunch there, or that everyone is supposed to. Not everyone likes Mexican food. What could be a treat for you may be a very unpleasant experience for someone else. The danger is that there are many counterfeits out there. Whether we might suffer from an overactive imagination, or an over-zealous straining-to-hear, or whether we might mistakenly *assume* that our world-influenced (or church-influenced) training is God, or whether we might come under the attack of seductive spirits, **we need to get our roots down deep into what we know is God's word, so we can discern truth from error, and become stable, secure, established, and effective in our faith-journey with God.**