

Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

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What's Next?

by Dan Trygg

“But He was also telling them a parable: ‘No one tears a piece of cloth from a new garment and puts it on an old garment; otherwise he will both tear the new, and the piece from the new will not match the old.’³⁷ And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the new wine will burst the skins and it will be spilled out, and the skins will be ruined.’³⁸ But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins.’³⁹ And no one, after drinking old wine wishes for new; for he says, ‘The old is good enough.’” Luke 5:36-39

“‘...beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.’”¹² Then they understood that He did not say to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” Matthew 16:11-12

Last week at church I asked the question, “How many of you have been to another church?” Virtually every one raised their hand. I have no problem with us visiting other churches, seminars or religious gatherings. Any place we can go that helps us grow and be encouraged in our Christian walk is generally a positive investment. I am concerned, however, about the subtle propagandizing effect that can take place when we visit other places, or listen to Christian media. **We tend to gather our expectations and sense of normality from our exposure to church-type functions. Right or wrong, we tend to mimic or follow the example of religious people or groups we meet along the way.** When we grow up in, or are influenced by, a religious culture, there are ways of looking at things, ways of doing things, and unspoken rules of appropriate behavior which tend to “soak in” to our heads almost like osmosis. There are very strong dynamics at work which tend to conform us to the thinking and behavior of the group. These are mostly observed and processed almost unconsciously. **We just tend to do and think what others are doing or saying that they think, without evaluating if this is what the Bible is actually prescribing for us, or not.** This is especially true if we are a young Christian, or a child, growing up in this environment. We don't have a Biblically informed understanding to guide us. **We are like a blank slate, indiscriminately allowing others to write on us what “normality” should look like in the religious arena.** This dynamic is a natural human way of learning from our environment, and generally serves us well in learning to navigate in our world, *except* when the information and examples we receive are misguided, dysfunctional or unhealthy. **When we indiscriminately learn from the examples and teachings of others who are sick or misguided, we unknowingly take on their unhealthy traits along with what may be exemplary.** We take on, and then pass on, the same sickness or confusion we are being influenced by.

Jesus was dealing with this very issue in the context of Luke 5, where He taught about the impossibility of mixing old and new. In the context, the Lord was not at all behaving as the religious people thought a righteous person should behave. **In their culture, the religious people emphasized separating themselves from the unrighteous people of their society.** The word “holy” means “separated” or “consecrated”, and referred to something set apart from common use and designated for special use. In reference to religion, it meant set apart unto God. This implied a change of life, a turning away from selfishness and sin, and a devotion to serve God. Somewhere in their attempt to carry this good desire out, however, the religious people of Jesus' age began to emphasize separating themselves from common, everyday, sinful people in order to more seriously devote themselves unto God. There *is* a legitimate basis for this in the Scripture (Psa. 1; Lev. 11:44), but these Pharisees (lit. – “separated ones”) began to be corrupted with an attitude of self-righteousness. This grew into religious pride, an attitude of superiority, and a consequent disdain toward others who were not “as separated as they were”. **This teaching of “separateness”, though it may have originally have been the result of a healthy devotion to God, had become a very ugly thing. It had created a system of religious performance and appearances that emphasized outward behavior and religious duties.** Somewhere along the way, these religious people forgot that they were made of the same stuff as other people. Because they were successful in keeping their religious appearances, they began to think themselves as better than others. In reality, however, their sinfulness was still there. It was conveniently covered up by their religious performance, but they were not fooling anyone but themselves. **Jesus called them hypocrites, because they were pretending to be something they were not. They were pretending to be righteous, when inwardly they were arrogant, greedy, prideful and lacked the compassion of God.** They may have looked like they were successfully keeping religious duties, but their attitudes reeked more of the rottenness of sinful human flesh than of the goodness of God (Gal. 5:19-21). **Unlike Jesus, their brand of holiness drove people away, instead of drawing them to God.**

Jesus had to caution His disciples regarding the “leaven” of the Pharisees and Sadducees, which He defined as both their hypocrisy and their teaching, i.e., both their religious example and their message (Lk. 12:1; Matt.

16:12). **Jesus warned them, because He understood how dangerous and pervasive these things can be. Once leaven gets into a lump of dough, it slowly, almost imperceptively works its way through the entire lump.** It eventually infects and affects everyone, unless it is clearly confronted and removed. **This was an ongoing problem in the early church, and throughout church history.** In the NT, the Judaizers kept trying to bring the old system of religious performance and practices back into the church. They pop up in Acts 15, and Paul had to deal with their kind of teaching wherever he went. Trying to mix legalism with spirituality does not work. **Trying to change the inner man by changing outside behaviors is a complete impossibility.** It is as powerless today as it ever was. You don't end up with a spiritually-empowered legalism; **you end up with an outward form of spirituality with no inner life or substance.** Any attempt to mix the two is death to the reality of the Spirit. **The attempt to mix the religious old system with the new life in the Spirit brought death, not spiritual maturity.** Because they tried to keep religious disciplines by their fleshly self-effort, they got the results or "works" of the flesh (Gal. 5:19-21), instead of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22,23). This is a classic example of "if you always do what you always did, you'll always get what you always got". It is living by the flesh, dressed up in religious clothes. It is still self-effort, and that can only give you what self-effort gave you before.

Just as trying to live a Spiritual life by self-effort is impossible, in a similar way a Spiritually-led person will be an enigma and offense to a religious person. Again, we see Jesus as our prime example. He was always doing things that broke the "religious rules" of His culture, and was offending the religious leaders. The apostles, too, were a puzzle to the chief priests (Acts 4:13). Jesus said that the world would hate His followers, just as they hated Him (Jn. 15:18-16:4). His words have been proven true, not only in the experiences of Christians in the NT, but throughout church history. Paul stated it as a principle: Unspiritual people do not understand spiritual things. They appear foolish to them. Furthermore, spiritual people cannot be figured out by unspiritually-minded people (I Cor. 2:14-15). **Like Jesus' parables of the new patch on the old garment, and of the new wine in old skins, the new life of the Spirit is incompatible with the old religious mindset and forms.** Either the religious mindset will shut down and hamper the life of the Spirit, or the Spirit-led person will be an offense to the expectations of those in the old religious system.

How does that relate to the first paragraph of this study? Unfortunately, **the dynamics of most church gatherings in our culture are not at all in line with what the NT describes as the design and intent of God's called-out people.** Most of us have experienced church in a format where we were there as passive listener-observers, not active participants. It is very clear from reading the NT that **church is supposed to be a gathering where we take initiative to speak into one another's lives to encourage and build up each other.** There are twenty-one different ways we are to interact with each other to help one another grow and stay on track in following Jesus. Unfortunately, that has not been our experience in most church settings we have probably attended. So, **our experiences have taught us to expect something very different than what Jesus and the apostles intended for the church.** In our case, if we were to really get turned on by the Lord, and try to interact with each other as the Bible instructs during most church gatherings, we would be considered to be out of order, and asked to be still, or to leave. **The forms and expectations of our current religious conventions are like the old garment, or the old wineskins. If you put new vibrant life into these rigid forms, the new life disrupts the program.** It doesn't fit. Furthermore, those who are used to the old forms think "the old is good enough". If we are to find a place where the "new wine" can ferment and mature, then we must find some "fresh wineskins", forms and ways of meeting that are flexible enough to accommodate the growth of the bubbling life of the Kingdom.

The same is true regarding the expectations of the life cycle of a church. We are taught to expect that a group gets an established core group, grows to a place where it is too big for its space, and then the group rents or purchases a bigger space. If it continues to grow, the group purchases an even bigger space. **The goal is to get bigger and bigger, isn't it? Actually, that is an assumption.** There is a place where if our bodies get bigger and bigger, they will become unhealthy, right? **If the goal is not to get bigger, what is it? It is to make disciples. It is to raise up more and more mature believers who will be expanding the work of the Kingdom.** Doesn't that mean that we have to get bigger? No. It simply means we have to multiply. **We have to reproduce other working interactive, disciple-making groups. There are several advantages to that.** The first is that the strongest, most well-documented strategy for evangelism is *starting new churches*. **Whenever new churches start, inevitably new people will be reached,** will be led to Christ and will grow. **Secondly, we can reach into new areas** more effectively than if we stay in one location. **Third, new groups require new leadership. The starting of new groups causes people to step up and take responsibility.** People will teach, if there is no one else to do so. **As they experiment, people find areas of giftedness that they did not know they had.** What next? Let's find fresh wineskins for the fresh wine.