

Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc www.dtminc.org Today's Date: October 24, 2010

Growing Up Unto Salvation: What Are We Listening To?

"Therefore putting away all hateful feelings and all deceitful-treachery and hypocrisy and envy and all evil-speaking, as newborn infants long for the untreacherous spiritual milk, in order that by it y'all might grow unto salvation..." I Pet. 2:1,2

"And I, brothers and sisters, was not able to speak to y'all as to spiritual ones, rather as fleshly ones, as infants in Christ. I fed y'all milk, not solid food, for not yet were you able. Rather, not even yet now are you able, for you are still fleshly ones. For while among y'all is jealousy and strife, are you not fleshly ones and walk about according to humanness?" I Cor. 3:1-3

"...the message to us is lengthy and difficult to explain, since y'all have become lazy ones (without "push") with the ears. For being obligated to be teachers, because of the time-span, y'all have need again to be taught the elements of the beginning of the words of God and have come to be ones having need of milk, not solid food. For everyone partaking of milk is inexperienced concerning a message of righteousness, for he/she is an infant. But the solid food is of mature ones, the ones on account of use are having the faculties- of-discernment having been exercised-and-trained toward discernment of both healthy-good and injurious-evil. Consequently, leaving the-of- the-beginning-of-Christ-message, we might carry (for ourselves) into maturity..." Heb. 5:11-6:1

Each passage above was written by different authors to three different settings, each with their unique problems. All three writers recognized that the maturity level of those to whom they were writing required that they be fed "spiritual milk", the basic truths that would provide sustenance to fortify them in specific areas of need. In the case of Peter's readers, this was entirely appropriate, for they were newborn babes. In the case of the other two groups, this was a disappointing reality, ...an unfortunate limitation..., because they *should have* grown beyond these things. Since they had *not*, however, ***there was nothing to be done except to feed them once again the spiritual milk, and hope that this time they would process it more fully, so that they will be able to move on into maturity.***

Before we shake our heads and dismiss the believers of Corinth or the Hebrew Christians as an "unfortunate bunch of developmentally-delayed Christians", it may be wise to take a closer look at what was going on in these two groups and do a little *self*-evaluation. It is certain that **the Corinthians' self-perception was that they had things pretty much together.** In fact, *that* was one of their spiritual blind spots, **they were puffed up with pride about what they knew** (I Cor. 8:1,2), **...or who they knew** (1:10-13; 3:3-6)...., **...or what they could "do"**, spiritually (I Cor. 12:21; 14:1-33)...., but they had remained closed toward the things that would truly cause them to grow, ... things that would confront their fleshly pride, and produce a deeper humility and care for one another. There were certain movements of the Spirit that they were very much aware of, and *seeking after*, just as there were certain areas of freedom that they had studied diligently, and were eager to demonstrate. In both of these scenarios, **however, they were focused on things that appealed to surface issues of self-interest, but which did not really get to the heart of inner transformation.**

Doctrinal destructiveness. Some correctly understood that since idols were not real gods, the animals offered as sacrifices to them were just meat (I Cor. 8:1-13; 10:19-33). Nothing good or bad happened to the meat just because it had been offered in an idol's temple. Since it was sold *at a cheaper price* in the temple meat markets than could often be purchased at the city marketplace, some Christians who felt comfortable about it were going into the idol's temple market to purchase meat. A problem arose, however, when they encouraged other believers, fresh converts from the idol worship practices, to join them in this practice. These folks were not quite free from their former religious beliefs. It felt like they were going back on their newfound allegiance to Christ. As a result, they felt self-condemned. **The Corinthian Christians, while correct in their doctrine, were insensitive to their brothers or sisters** in this regard. They continued this practice even though they could see the turmoil it caused their fellow believers. **Their greater understanding gave them greater freedom in this practice, but they used their freedom only for selfish gain, not to build up their siblings in Christ.** Their attitude was, "That's *their* problem. I am not going to limit *my* freedom just because *they* are a little squeamish." From a theological perspective, they were justified in their actions, yet *they were blatantly violating the law of love.* Self-interest won out over the interests and concerns of their brothers and sisters in Christ. **They were "right in the head, but wrong in the heart".** Their *freedom* was being used as a *justification for evil.* **They had correctly discerned a spiritual truth, but were oblivious to a greater, more important principle. Therefore, in Paul's estimation, they were fleshly, babes in Christ. They lacked more mature discernment.**

Selfish spirituality. A very similar scenario was occurring in the use of their spiritual gifts (I Cor. 13:1-3; 14:1-40). Some gifts were being emphasized all out of proportion to what was healthy for everyone. The gift of tongues could be a dramatic, exciting experience, *for those who were utilizing it.* Nevertheless, if *others* could not share in the experience, because there was no interpretation, then it was of little value *to them.* The tongue speakers had a *legitimate gift* of the Spirit, but *were utilizing it illegitimately*, i.e., without concern for others. This was especially

evident when the unbeliever, or ungifted person would enter into a meeting where everyone was speaking in tongues simultaneously, and would be turned off by it, thinking that they were crazy. The tendency of the Corinthians was to think, "That is *their* problem. *We* are speaking in the Spirit." Again, they were correct in the minutia, but incorrect in the larger picture. If their concern was only for *their own pleasure*, edification and stimulation, then they could justify their actions. If, however, they were to examine how well they addressed the edification, comfort, and stimulation of these *other* believers, they were missing the mark. ***They were using their personal freedom as a license for abusing or disregarding others. They may have a legitimate spiritual gift, but they were missing the Spirit's heart.***

Piggish potlucks. Another situation where this same *selfish-orientation* would surface had to do with their potluck/communion meals (1 Cor. 11:17-34). The wealthy would be able to arrive earlier, while the laborer or slave would not be able to come until much later. Often, when the latecomers would arrive, the food would be *gone*, and some of the people were actually *drunk* from sitting all evening drinking wine! *Instead of reinforcing love, acceptance, and communion with God, it provoked feelings of being left out, unimportant, unconsidered, ...fostering feelings of disappointment, anger and resentment.* A meal that was to epitomize spiritual oneness that transcended all racial or cultural barriers or class distinction became an event that *mocked* these ideals, and reinforced the oppression and injustice of the world. ***Again, those who had freedom, did not use it to serve their fellow believers, but saw only to their own comforts.*** The overall purpose of the "love feast" became lost in **the myopic pursuit of self-interest.**

Personality partisanship. The divisiveness of the church was a result of the same problem. Some had found the ministry of one teacher to be especially helpful *to them*, and began promoting that person above other teachers. They identified their own favorites, and *began to compare and argue about who was better* (e.g., 1:10-12). Again, ***self-benefit and self-enjoyment served as the reference point of the quarrels***, while the thrust of what these teachers undoubtedly taught about love and Christian maturity was totally lost in the debate.

"Rights" or "righteous"? Or, again, consider the quarrelling about rights and bringing one another to court over disputes (6:1-8). *The focus was upon "my rights" and upon "winning the argument", rather than upon love and harmony.* There was no "let's find a way to work this out". It was immediately to drag the other believer before the judge. ***Self-interest won out over concern for peace.***

Sin sanctuary. Finally, the Corinthian church was **tolerant of blatant, open sin.** A man was living with his father's wife (5:1-13). ***Everyone knew it was wrong, but no one was willing to say or do anything about it.*** Instead of getting in touch with the pain and grief that this should bring, they simply "puffed up" themselves (5:2), and went on as if this did not matter. ***Again, the thought was that my personal walk, my personal freedom to follow Christ, is unhindered by the condition of those around me. Paul strongly confronts this attitude.*** If the leaven of sin is allowed to grow, it *will* permeate the *entire* group. *Everyone will be affected. It must be removed.*

These examples give us a glimpse into the *modus operandi* of the Corinthian church. ***Instead of listening to the Holy Spirit, they were listening to their flesh, ...their self-comfort and self-pleasure.*** The problems mentioned above were ongoing, habitual patterns that you can be sure that the Spirit was attempting to expose. The Spirit and the flesh are opposed to each other, and those who live by the Spirit will not carry out the lusts of the flesh (Gal. 5:16,17). The Spirit was given to reveal the things of God, and to lead us in His will (1 Cor. 2:10-12; Rom. 8:14). ***Instead of evaluating things by the Spirit, these believers were attuned and responsive to their flesh*** (1 Cor. 2:11-3:3).

The Hebrew Christians seem to be operating by the same basic underlying dynamic of listening to self-comfort and self-interest instead of to the leadings of God. The writer identifies the problem there as that they "**have become lazy-with-the-ears**", or "dull of hearing". ***Because they had not developed their "listening ability", they had need for someone else to plainly tell them what they should have otherwise discerned on their own.*** They needed the spiritual milk, the basic first principles of the word of God, to get them refocused, and back on track. They needed to be fed this stuff by *someone else*, because *they* had become unaccustomed to the message of righteousness, and *they* had become inattentive or unable to listen with their spiritual ears. ***To get on track and stay on track, we need to: (1.) Get accustomed to the word (Gk.- *logos*) of righteousness, because it delineates the big picture, the plan, character, ways and workings of God in history, and the parameters and general direction of His will; (2.) Seek to listen and discern good from evil.*** This enables me to determine what God is telling *me* to do *in my immediate personal situation.* Of course, we do not always receive a clear personal message (Gk. - *rhēma*) from the Lord. Jesus indicated that He "saw" what the Father was doing (Jn.5:19,20), meaning that *He was attentive* to what God might be initiating around Him, and *He had learned to recognize and discern* His activity. ***(3.) Deny self.*** This is one of the first requirements for following Jesus (Lk. 9:23). Whenever self-interest rears its ugly head, we must turn away and ask for God's mind and heart. ***(4.) Walk in the Spirit of love.*** The Spirit will lead us to deny flesh and walk in love.