

Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

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Growing Up Unto Salvation: Developing Maturity

by Dan Trygg

"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

"Concerning which the message to us is lengthy and difficult to explain, since y'all have become lazy ones with the ears. For even being obligated to be teachers, on account 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 practice 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 be brought into maturity..." Heb. 5:11-6:1

How do we proceed to move on to maturity? What seem to be the ingredients that are necessary or beneficial to moving me on into maturity? Following are five main points to help us effectively progress, spiritually:

1. Get established in the "elementary teachings" (Heb. 5:11-6:2). Basically, these are teachings that lay a solid foundation in answering three questions: "Who am I, as a Christian?"; "How did I get here?"; and, "Where am I going from here?" Another way to think of these is that they deal with my **identity**, my **assurance**, and my **destiny**.

(a.) It is critical to confidently understand that I am no longer just a sinner, rather I am a new creature in Christ, a child of God (II Cor. 5:17). Certainly, the good news was about how Jesus died to pay for my sins, but, more than that, *He came to make me new* (Rom. 6:4-6). He came to *put within me a new kind of life* (Jn. 3:1-8; Gal. 2:20; 3:26-29; 4:4-6; Rom. 8:9-17). **(b.) I need to clearly understand that this is entirely the result of trusting in His grace.** It is *not* the result of *any* good works I have done, or might do (Eph. 2:8,9). Furthermore, **there is no possibility of undoing the reality of His work in me through my behavior.** He has offered me an infusion of life from outside of myself. I have accepted His offer, and *He has given me this inner infusion of life*, which is the new core of my being. *Nothing* can destroy or mitigate the reality of that Divine presence which is now inside of me. **(c.) I have been enlisted in God's Kingdom to serve Him, ...and He has things for me to do** (Eph. 2:10). My role in His service is *significant*, and *requires my attention and cooperative action*. Ultimately, Jesus will return and end this present world as we know it. At that time, I will see the result of my action or inaction in response to His leading, and give an accounting for what I have done. **These "elementary teachings" clearly establish that I am a new creature in Christ, by virtue of God's grace, and that my calling is to serve Him to the best of the ability that He gives to me.**

2. Develop the "expectations of maturity" (I Cor. 2:6-13). At its most basic foundation, this is a two-fold confident belief that **(a.) God is with me**, and that **(b.) He wants to be active in my life**. A third truth is that **(c.) He wants to communicate His will to me**. These three confident expectations are what begin to set us on the direction toward a deeper, more effective walk with God.

3. Learn to listen to the Holy Spirit. Jesus had said that He would send the Holy Spirit to be a helper like Him (Jn. 14:16,17,26). The word translated as "**helper**" means literally, "**one invited alongside to help**", implying that we really ought to be not only *expecting His input*, but *asking Him for His counsel, direction, and power*. He is the "promise of the Father", the "gift" that sets apart the New Covenant dynamic from that of the Old Covenant (Lk. 24:49; Acts 1:4,5; 2:38). Instead of an *external* law, to which we try to conform our behavior, the Holy Spirit has come to write the law *internally*, "upon our hearts", so that we can naturally carry out the righteous leadings coming from within us (Heb. 8:6-13). Paul went on to say that "we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God" (I Cor. 2:12). This comment is set within the context of what is "wisdom for the mature" (vs. 6), which he indicates is revealed to us by the Spirit (vss. 9,10).

It is quite clear from these passages, and many others, that **God intends for us to experience a regular, discernible communication from the Holy Spirit** (e.g., Rom. 8:14; I Cor. 2:13; Gal. 5:16-18,25). This is the teaching and experience of believers throughout the NT (e.g., Acts 8:29; 10:19,20; 20:22,23; 21:11). Since God is no respecter of persons (i.e., He does not "play favorites"), we should expect that He intends to treat us the same as He did the NT Christians. **The fact that He intends to communicate to us should be considered a given. Learning to detect and discern His communication, however, is an art which requires faith and practice.** Some of us have never developed, or have shut down, our "receptors", and it takes some time for us to begin to notice what others appear to

easily discern. We may feel foolish, at first, because we hear nothing that is clear. As we invest time in prayer, listening and reflecting, as well as hearing the testimony of others who seem to be adept at this, we will begin to pick up the tools we need to recognize and discern His voice. I Cor. 2:13, though poorly translated in some versions, actually says that Paul received and spoke things "not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, *spiritual ones judging together spiritual things*." What this means is that we should seek the help of those more advanced in this skill to assist us in this process of learning and discerning the voice of the Spirit.

4. Train your senses to discern good from evil. How do we do this? Here we receive a little further direction from the Hebrews passage. All three of the above passages emphasize the need for spiritual milk, the predigested nourishment that comes from another. This is a starting point. Then the author to the Hebrews adds a phrase in verse 13 that clarifies a bit more what it is that we are after. He (or she) writes, "for everyone partaking of milk is *inexperienced* in a matter of righteousness." The word translated as "inexperienced" or "unaccustomed" literally means "untested". It refers to a lack of knowledge or capacity to do something, a lack of skill *due to lack of experience and trial*. Their skill level is that of a *novice* in this area, even though they may have been Christians for a long time. So **this person tends to partake of milk because they are not experienced or skilled at "doing life" on their own**, at least in the matter of discerning what is right. **They are used to being told what to do, not having to figure it out.**

Interestingly, most Bible translations focus on a Bible-oriented translation for this verse, "is not accustomed to the word of righteousness" (NASB). While that may be a part of what is being described here, it is too narrow a translation. There is no "the" in the Greek, so the focus is not specifically on "*the* word of righteousness", it is upon "*a* word, message, matter, thing, or event (all acceptable definitions of *logos* in Greek) concerning what is right". The Scriptures may be a good resource to use for this, but **the focus is not on "being unacquainted with the Bible"** (The NT was not even written, yet!), **so much as "being unskilled at figuring out what is the right course of action to take"**. The following verse then expands upon this even more. **The mature ones are those "possessing senses having-been-exercised by practice toward discernment** both of healthy-good and injurious-evil." The word translated as "having-been-exercised" is the Greek word, *gumnazō*, from which we derive the English word, "gymnasium". **It presented a strong word picture of practice, exercise, discipline, and self-control.** It was used to describe the training procedures of Olympic athletes. A key feature of such a course of training is the focused mindset and self-discipline to undergo months and months of repetitive exercise in order to build up the capacity to function at top performance when the final "test situation" came up. Here, in the book of Hebrews, muscle-bulk is not the focus, rather it is discerning-ability that is being "beefed up" by *exercise and practice*. Note, too, that the kind of discernment being called for is not theological insightfulness, nor a "discerning of spirits" or ability to interpret dreams and revelations. *The discerning-ability called for here is a perception into what would be practical, healthy, and upright behavior in a given situation*, versus what might be damaging and injurious to people. **Mature people have taken the responsibility on to develop themselves through training and practice to be able to discern what is healthy and good from what is injurious and evil.** Another possible translation of the text may be that solid food is to be found *with* those who are fully grown (i.e., it is "of mature ones"), meaning that deeper insights will be gleaned from *sharing with others who have trained themselves to discern good and evil*. In any case, *the goal is self-equipping*, not dependence.

5. Live your life according to God, not according to human values and principles. This comes from I Cor. 3:3. Growth in our spiritual development is *more than just intellectual*. *It requires the exercise of self-control*, so that we learn to no longer walk in human wisdom and old behavior-patterns. It is volitional development (the will), as well as mental (the mind). **There are skills of self-restraint, as well as self-risk and self-expression, which must be exercised and practiced in order for change and growth to come to pass in us.** If we go through the motions of study, worship, fellowship, prayer, etc., only to continue to live life as we have always done, then our faith is a sham, a profitless curiosity to occupy our time. **The bottom line is change.** It is becoming more like Jesus Christ in our character, so that His image is more and more clearly seen in us (Rom. 8:29). *The more we mature, the more we ought to stand out as different*, as peculiar, ...not because we are weird, but because we don't live like others choose to live. Again, as we have often said, *the identifying mark of being a follower of Jesus Christ ought to be a visible, radical, unusual love-commitment expressed in action* toward one another, and toward all people. This is a severe departure from the ways of humankind, and will cause others to take note and say, "God is among them." Of course, **if our ability to discern good from evil comes from practice, then we must be living out our perceptions of the leadings of the Holy Spirit in order to observe the outcome of our actions, and to discover if we are hearing correctly.**