

Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc www.dtminc.org Today's Date: December 5, 2010

Changing Your Orientation to Produce Maturity, Love and Unity

by Dan Trygg

"And I, brothers *and sisters*, could not speak to y'all as to spiritual ones, rather as to fleshly ones, as to infants in Christ. I gave y'all milk to drink, not solid food, for not yet were y'all being able to receive it. On the contrary, not even yet now are y'all being able, for still y'all are being fleshly ones. For wherever among y'all is jealousy and strife, are you not being fleshly ones, and do you not walk about according to humanness?"
I Cor. 3:1-3

Unity of the Body, and visible expressions of agapē love, are to be the best and strongest indicators that there really *is* something unique about those who claimed to be following Jesus. By these two characteristics, Jesus had declared that His followers would be *most recognizable* as specifically His, and their lifestyle interactions would validate Jesus' claims before a skeptical world (Jn. 13:34,35; 17:20,21). Anyone who could drastically transform people, so that they regularly interact with devotion and love, and radically support one another in need, as we read about in the early church (Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-36), must truly have been sent from God! ***This kind of co-operation and self-giving is impossible to explain on a strictly human level alone.*** Furthermore, *if agapē love and unity were, indeed, to be the major evidences for the reality of God's visitation of this planet, then we can begin to understand why the themes of love, unity and body-life are so important in Paul's teaching.* When you survey the practical teachings of Paul, and the other apostles, as well, it is amazing to note that there is *relatively little about a preaching or missionary strategy* to reach the world for Christ. The *main thrust* of their teaching is on developing healthy, loving relationships with one another in the Body of Christ. **The primary outreach strategy of NT writers seems to be about transforming lives in Christ, and establishing relationship systems where this radical transformation can be clearly seen through the interactions of Christians with one another.** This is a two-pronged approach.

(1.) Followers of Jesus were taught to *develop intimacy with God and learn to walk in response to the leadings of the Holy Spirit.* (2.) They were also taught to *commit themselves to fostering honest, healthy, supportive relationships with other believers.* **These relationships were not only for growth and accountability, but also provided a backdrop where the practical love of Jesus could be expressed.** As we examine this passage from I Corinthians, we can gain some insight into how to deal with some of the problems that make unity and love so difficult to come by.

In the previous few verses of I Corinthians 2, **the apostle had begun to introduce three kinds of people.** There is the "natural person" (2:14), the "spiritual person" (2:15), and the "fleshly person" (3:1). In the case of the **"natural" person**, the Greek adjective is psuchikos, from the word, psuchē, meaning "soul, self, individual, or natural life". Since the "soul" was the seat of self-awareness and self-identity, psuchikos could also be used to refer to a person's mind (the word "psychology" is derived from this Greek word). **A "natural person" is one who is self-ish, or lives out of the orientation of a natural-life** (i.e., according to their normal self-awareness), **in contrast to a spiritually-directed individual.** It would be easy to categorize this person as a non-Christian, but that is not necessarily true. The context only defines it in terms of *function*. Because Paul does not indicate that this is the problem with the Corinthians, and because of certain arguments based upon the contrast, many scholars have concluded that this person is not a believer at all. This may not be the case, however, but may only describe an orientation not typical of those at Corinth. The contrast between natural and spiritual is also described in I Cor. 15:44, using the same words. There is a different Greek word for strictly physical animal life (Gk., bios), however, which is *not* used. Basically, **what Paul says about the "natural person" is that he, or she, does not receive, accept, or welcome the things of the Spirit of God, because they seem foolish to him/her.** If Paul meant that statement in the absolute sense, then, yes, he must be speaking of non-Christians only. However, I know certain Christians who are closed to the validity of certain spiritual experiences or phenomena, some of which are plainly described in the New Testament. Are *they* living out of a "natural" orientation? By excluding, or not welcoming or expecting, the possibility of such things, then the rest of what Paul says about them would also be true, i.e., "they are not able to understand them (lit., to know-by-experience the spiritual things mentioned), because they are spiritually discerned (examined, or evaluated)". We know from 14:12, that the Corinthians were zealously eager for spiritual things (the word "gifts" is not in the Greek), so that was not *their* problem. We are a bit too hasty to limit this first kind of person to the unregenerate. It could simply refer to those who approach life *only* from a natural, self-directed angle, and are suspicious or unwelcoming of being led by the Holy Spirit.

The second type of individual Paul describes is a "spiritual person". This type is **characterized by a questioning, examining, discerning type of heart.** Such a person "appraises all things", meaning that **he is on the watch for God's Spirit in every situation.** Yet, *because he or she is open to receiving information or "leadings" from the Holy Spirit, -- an unseen information-stream imperceptible to the casual outside observer -- , a spiritually-*

directed person will do things that others do not understand or comprehend. It is this spiritual person who is as the mature one, in contrast to spiritual babes. In 2:12, Paul had said that he, and those on his team, had received (or "taken") the Spirit of God in order that they might know (by observation) the things God had freely given to them. These were the things that he was now declaring to them. This understanding did not come through words of human wisdom, but teachings of the Spirit, *by spiritual people comparing (judging together) spiritual things. Two observations from this: (1.) It is possible to become a "spiritual person".* Paul knew and worked together with some. *(2.) God's spiritual direction, His personal leadings, deeper insights, and corporate direction is often more clearly discernible when true, spiritually-directed people work together to understand the information that God reveals to them as a group.* Paul habitually used this team-approach to discern both where he was to go (Acts 16:6-10) and what kinds of things to share with the people he was serving. In this letter, for example, he is accompanied in his writing by Sosthenes (1:1), a leader from Corinth, and he also addresses problems in the church brought to his attention by "Chloe's people" (1:11), people from the family household of Chloe, or possibly from the house church which met at her house.

The third type of person Paul mentions is described as "fleshy". This adjective offers a different word picture for us to consider. **Being "fleshy", or "carnal", draws our attention to the physical body, ...to physical animal appetites, ...to the fallen Adam-nature which we still bear within us (Rom 7:14), ...to the material, physical, sensual realities of life as opposed to spiritual things (Rom. 15:27; I Cor. 9:11). Christianity, as also Judaism, does not teach that our material bodies are evil. After all, God made them, and pronounced them "very good" (Gen. 1:31). One of the consequences of our fallenness, however, is an inordinate focus on fleshly desires and comforts, i.e., sensuality.** It is important to see that **the outworkings of this are not only the pursuit of physical pleasure, but also the expression of unhealthy inner emotion, the agitation of which we "feel" inside of us.** In Gal. 5:19-21, we see that unrestrained emotional outbursts and emotionally-charged arguing are part of the "works of the flesh" listed there. The same is true of the list in James 3:13-4:1. James identifies the source of the problem as the "pleasures/passions that wage war in your members" (4:1). In I Pet. 2:11, it is "fleshly desires that wage war against the soul". It makes sense that **if we feel the agitation of emotion within us, and if we are flesh-focused, we will act to relieve or express those feelings. The goal of the maturing process is to be less "flesh-focused", and learn to deal with our inner feelings from a spiritual perspective. A mature person has learned to evaluate and control those emotions.**

Observations and Conclusions:

- 1. The basic contrast of the word picture Paul uses is that of immaturity versus maturity.** By using the term "infants in Christ", Paul clearly indicates that **we all start out as "fleshy" in our orientation. Maturity means that our fleshly inclinations will be restrained and/or readjusted in light of input from the spiritual perspective.**
- 2. Jealousy, unhealthy competition, and strife are the result of a fleshly orientation, sensuality.** The evidence of this behavior is a thermometer of our spiritual maturity, or lack of it.
- 3. This kind of behavior is typical of humankind, in general, and shows that fleshly Christians are attempting to live life in the same way as those without Christ do.** In James 3:15, this strategy for life is described as "earthly, natural (psuchikos), demonic", certainly *far less* than what we could be capable of in Christ. The language Paul uses is "you walk about according to humankind". This implies that we should *not* be operating like other people.
- 4. A fleshly orientation to life limits our ability to perceive and understand deeper spiritual insights.**
- 5. Unlike physical immaturity, which is naturally displaced over time by the onset of pre-programmed changes that take place without our conscious mental involvement (e.g. hormones in adolescence), according to Heb. 5:11-14, spiritual immaturity can be stalled out indefinitely. Spiritual maturation requires attention and effort.**
- 6. The use of the maturity/immaturity image implies a growth process.** II Peter 1:5-8 describes practical steps involved in making changes in our character. *We will* experience some discomfort, and *will* bumble around, as we pursue growth. It is part of the process, so do not be surprised. Note, too, that agapē is the final step in the maturity process. *Love and unity are the expected fruit of lives that are yielded to God. If we are effectively following Jesus, our lives will be full of His love, and we will work hard to develop and maintain openness and unity in the Body.*