

Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc www.dtminc.org Today's Date: March 6, 2011

Think About, Observe, and Imitate

by Dan Trygg

"Keep-in-mind the ones leading you, who spoke to you the word of God, concerning whom observing-carefully the outcome of their habitual-conduct, imitate the faith."
Hebrews 13:7

The New Testament is always challenging us to grow and develop, in many areas of our lives. As we call upon Jesus as Our Savior and Lord, God causes us to be born from above by the power of the Holy Spirit, who comes to dwell in us from that moment. From that point begins a struggle of flesh against Spirit, ...of laziness and resistance-to-change in opposition to the struggle and work of growth, ...of selfishness over against living to serve God and others. **Our old self often is content to live with whatever is immediately comfortable. Unfortunately, immediate comfort will not stretch us to become all that we can be. There is a need for discipline and risk in order for us to grow and develop.**

This is true in so many areas of life. How can we develop **mentally**, if we do not apply ourselves to learn? How can we be healthy **physically**, if we do not eat and exercise properly? How can we be healthy **emotionally**, if we continue to put ourselves in emotionally damaging relationships, ...or keep stuffing our emotional pain and medicating ourselves, instead of honestly examining our emotional hurts and doing something about them? How can we **develop our social skills**, if we do not broaden our exposure to new people, even people that may be different that we are? What about **economically**? Can we expect a better paying job if we don't make some improvements to become a more valuable, marketable employee? That means we need to continue to learn new job skills and broaden our education. What about **managing the money we receive**? We can continue to operate as we have, or we can educate ourselves to learn more about handling our finances more effectively. Finally, it is quite clear that in order to grow **spiritually**, we must apply effort in order to learn and grow (Jn. 8:31; I Tim. 4:7b,8; II Tim. 2:15; Rom. 12:2). **There are skills to learn in all these areas, but it means that we will have to take responsibility not only to learn them, but also to implement them.**

If we don't take risks and try new things, why think that things may get better? Life does not work that way. Things don't generally "get better on their own". If you always do what you always did, you'll always get what you always got. If we want change to happen, if we want growth to occur, if we don't want to be "stuck", then we have to take responsibility for our own selves. **We have to honestly evaluate what we have been doing, ,,how we have been living..., to see what works well, and what doesn't, ...and be willing to make some changes.** Then, we need to look around to see if we can find a better way. We need some new ideas, some different options. If what we are doing is not working, then we need to look to others to see what works for them. Insanity is doing the same thing over and over, expecting different results. **Clarity and maturity is recognizing what is wrong and ineffective, and making healthy changes**, even if they are uncomfortable or difficult at first. A child lives in the immediate. It wants what it wants right now. **Part of maturing is the ability to begin to see beyond the present, and to be able to put off immediate gratification for a better result.** Give a kid a bag of candy, and they will tend to eat themselves sick. They *lack perspective*, and, consequently, don't make the best choices. Teenagers will tend to stay up late, even if they have to go to work in the morning. Again, *the immediate* is more important than the longer term *consequences*. What is really sad, however, is when people never grow up. When they insist on living in the immediate, and they try to ignore, minimize, or deny the consequences. So, you have "party animals" and "clubbers", who lose jobs, miss appointments, and, generally, mess themselves up, and maybe others, as well. **Growing up means "putting away childish things"** (I Cor. 13:11). Living successfully as an adult in an adult world means that you have to be responsible, and live with a longer-term perspective.

What about God? How does my faith impact my decisions regarding how I live my life? To many of us, God is nothing more than a compartment of our lives. We may say we are Christians, but, if someone were to follow us around, even read our thoughts, there may not be much to suggest that our faith impacts much of our day to day lives. Others of us may think about God, and talk about Him, a lot. We may listen to Christian music, watch Christian programs on TV, and go to numerous church activities in any given week, *but* we ourselves are still in control of our own lives, not God. The truth is that such people are operating from a religious world view. **Religion can be defined as human activity performed to either appease God's wrath, or secure His blessing. At the center of a religious person, however, is still the self.** I am in the driver's seat, not God. We may think we are doing what we do for God's sake, not our own, but we are still living life on *our* terms. In reality, we are serving

God as *we think* He ought to be served. We are deceiving ourselves into thinking that we know how to serve Him. Our lives are full of religious activity, but we are not really doing the things God would ask of us, at all (cf. Jn 12:26). The statement of Jesus, "the one who loves his self will ruin it, but he who is willing to let go of his or her self for Me, will preserve it for eternal life" (cf. Jn. 12:25; Mk. 8:35) cuts across all our preconceived ideas of what God wants to do with us, ...of what we we think we "should look like" when we are mature in Christ. ***The only measuring stick given to us in Scripture concerning what spiritual maturity will look like is that we will become like Jesus*** in our character and in how we live our lives (Rom. 8:29; Eph. 4:11-13; I Jn. 2:6; 3:2). **God hates "religion" because it is a poor caricature of what His Spirit would actually do with us.** Religion, whether seen in the form of an occasional "compartmental participant", or in the form of the religious addict or Pharisee, always brings God bad press. It is easily recognized, because it stinks of human hypocrisy and phoniness. It does not look like the definition of love in I Corinthians 13, or John 15:13.

So, we come to the passage for our study. We are we told by the author to "be thinking about your leaders". Who are these "leaders"? What two steps are we to follow in response to our thoughts of them? This might seem straightforward enough on the surface. You might be tempted to read this verse as "remember what your leaders *said* and do *that*", but that is not at all what is being said here. **First of all, who are the leaders mentioned here? The word in Greek refers to people who influence others so as to cause them to follow a recommended course of action or an example.** Note that this is a functional definition, not a positional one. In fact, in the Greek, it is not even a noun. It is a participle, an "-ing" word, i.e., "the ones leading you". **In other words, who has really influenced you to follow God?** Often the real "leaders" in your life are *not* the people who may be publicly recognized as official spokespeople, or those elected or hired to be leaders. They are the ones who have most personally influenced you to follow God. Usually it is their relationship with you that gives them credibility and influence. Here, however, there is an added phrase, "whoever spoke to you the word of God". Notice, again, the functional definition. **It is not limited to teachers or preachers.** Those words are not used here. It may be that they are *among* the ones who have influenced you, but **the writer has carefully chosen his words to broaden the scope to include a wider circle, ...people who have influenced us, pointed us to God, and encouraged us to follow Him by their words and example.**

Having identified who these people might be in our lives, the writer commands us to *be thinking of them*. To what end? This is very significant, because **the writer gives us two assignments to follow up on in our thoughts. The first is that we are to "be considering/observing-closely the outcome of their habitual conduct". We are encouraged to mentally evaluate the lives of our leaders.** He does not say that we are to pass judgment on them, since only God is to be the judge. (It is too easy to write someone off, when we pass sentence on them. We are all in process. Give people room to change. Continue to be willing to "truth in love" to those who may have failed in some way in the past.) **We are to be watchful to learn from their choices and example.**

Note that we are to watch the "outcome, result, end, or outworking" of their lives. Have they done well in the mental, physical, emotional, or spiritual areas of their lives? Are they "stuck" anywhere? Do they continue to grow? What are their shortcomings? What are their strengths? Can you see what may have led to that? What habitual-conduct can you see that has produced those good results? What habitual-conduct has been counter-productive? What insights or lessons can you gain for yourself by observing and meditating on their lives? You see, **the value of having "leaders" in our lives is that, since they "go ahead" of us, we can sometimes see what happens to them, and learn from their mistakes and weaknesses, as well as their strengths.** We are actually *encouraged* to do that. This is not a taboo. This is not about being disloyal. **It is about being discerning, and trying to find a better way.**

The second assignment is to "imitate the faith". This is in response to our remembering, observing and evaluating. This is the most important part. This is where the true benefit will come, if we will do it. You see, many of us get caught in the "analysis trap", a head game, or mental feedback loop, where we continue to examine and comment on what the right way is, or how someone ought to do things differently, but we never get around to actually *doing* anything differently ourselves. Thus, it should come as no surprise that **the final admonition to us is to "imitate the faith". We are supposed to do those things that are consistent with the true faith.** The original language does not say "imitate *their* faith", as some translations have rendered the passage. Why? Because, as we have already seen, *their* faith is imperfect. Rather, we are to imitate *the* faith. It may seem a small distinction, but it was worth mentioning. **We are not to follow human beings in their imperfection. We are to follow Jesus. To the extent that those who have influenced us can point us to Jesus, we can benefit from their help and example.** In the same way, if we can learn from their shortcomings so as to not stumble where they did (cf. I Cor. 10:1-11), then even their mistakes can help us, by serving as warning buoys to avoid disaster or danger.