

Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

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Precious and Exceedingly Great Promises

by Dan Trygg

“All things of His divine power pertaining to life and godliness have been given to us, through the true-knowledge of Him who called us to His own glory and excellence. By means of which things (the things of His divine power) the precious and exceedingly-great promises have been given to us, in order that by means of these you might come to be sharers of the divine nature, fleeing away from the corruption in the world by lust.”

II Peter 1:3,4

“As newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word, in order that by it you might grow unto salvation.”

I Peter 2:2

“And now I entrust you to God and to the word of His grace, which is being-able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all the ones having been set-apart-unto-Him”

Acts 20:32

I have been doing some soul searching and evaluating of my ministry in the past few weeks. I was reading a book that encouraged me to examine where my “sweet spot” was, that is, “What is it that I do where I really feel like I am experiencing the grace and power of God?” “Where do I see the unusual working of God active in my life?” The Lord brought a couple of things to mind, but my immediate response, the most clearly noticeable area to me of the flow of the Spirit in my life happens when I teach. Along with that revelation, I was reminded that **I have often noticed that when I am teaching those who are hungry to learn, the flow of the Spirit is very evident, and I experience great freedom in my teaching. On the other hand, when people are lackadaisical or resistant, I find the flow to be restricted or shut down.** I love to share the truth of God’s word with people, but when people are uninterested, I am grieved and find myself limited in what I can say. **When people are motivated and hungry to learn, I find that their desire seems to “tug on” my gift, and the Spirit responds to their interest by giving me freedom and ability to share.**

As I was pondering this, I could think of many examples of this phenomenon in my nearly 40 years of teaching experiences. I thought of those who really excelled in their spiritual growth, and those who did not. **Almost without exception, those who have grown quickly and soundly have been people who have invested in getting the word of God into their lives.** *They developed a daily quiet time, a time where they read and studied the Bible and spent time in prayer. They regularly attended Bible studies, and took notes in church. They listened to Christian radio, listening not only to the praise music, but also to good Bible teachers. They often also read other spiritual books, or listened to recorded teachings.* **Those who had more difficulty growing, or who seemed to get stuck or who wandered off, almost without exception did none of these things,** especially the Bible reading and study. I have found that the praise music, by itself, does not seem to give enough substance for most people to really spiritually develop. They need time in the word.

Of course, **this only makes sense, since a key part of spiritual growth is in renewing our minds** (Rom. 12:2; Eph. 4:23). **How can we change the way we live, if we don’t change the way we think?** How can we know or do anything different, if all we know is what we knew *before* we met Jesus, ...or if we live by the messages we get from the world system around us? Of course, **the Christian walk is way more than just thinking differently about behavior or lifestyle. It is fundamentally learning to live in the power of the Holy Spirit. The Bible is full of instruction, wisdom and promises that will help us learn to tap into this transforming, uplifting power.** If we are ignorant of these teachings and promises, however, then we will have difficulty learning to walk in the Spirit, and our lives will continue to be powerless and fleshly. The result will be frustration, defeat and painful consequences.

As I was pondering this, the Lord brought to my mind how many of those I know at church are not investing in this most basic of spiritual disciplines! **Some have been believers for years, but still do not even have a modicum of daily investment in God’s word.** How can we call ourselves followers of Jesus Christ, but not take time to find out who He is, what He has done, or what He has to say? He Himself said that those who continue in His word are genuinely His disciples. They will come to know the truth, and the truth would set them free. **Is it any wonder that so many of us keep going around the same mountain, time after time, ...falling for the same lies, ...repeating the same defeating behaviors? We are not learning the truth! We are continuing in the old ways of thinking, and, not surprisingly, we end up with the same results.**

My observations agree with the apostle Peter’s admonition in I Peter 2:2. He tells us there that **baby Christians need a steady diet of the word of God. This is like spiritual milk to new believers, and to anyone who is immature.** When you think about it, **new babies are not given a selection of table foods from birth. There is basically only one thing that they can eat that will not cause digestive problems or allergic reactions, and that is mother’s milk.** They can survive on that for quite some time. In fact, **that is all they are supposed to**

eat for several months. It provides all the nutrients they need to be able to grow and mature, provided in a form that they can easily digest. **When you think of an infant that is hungry, the one thing it wants is to be fed on is that milk.** Distracting it with a nuk or something else will only work for a brief time. It becomes desperate for milk, and will not be happy until it is fed. **This is the word picture Peter uses to illustrate how important it is for us to get into the word of God. We are to long for it as a newborn longs for its mother's breast, or the bottle. It is our necessary food, ...as necessary as milk is to a baby.** Anybody who has been a parent, or who has cared for infants, should be able to appreciate this vivid word picture that Peter chose.

Is this an anomaly? Is Peter the only one who places such stress on the value of the scriptures? **No, not at all.** We already referred to the fact that **Jesus expected His followers to be continuing in and living in His word.** Freedom from sin can be discovered for those who will study and live in the truth (Jn. 8:31-36). It is also the key to effective prayer (Jn. 15:7). **The apostles understood the importance of studying the truth for new believers. They organized the first 3,000 converts into home groups that devoted themselves daily to learning the teachings** of the apostles (Acts 2:41-47). These new believers were all Jews who were already well acquainted with the OT scriptures. Now, however, they were immersed in the new perspective which Jesus' death and resurrection added to those OT teachings and promises (Lk. 24:44-49). They learned about the "promise of the Father", the Holy Spirit, and were taught to share with and serve one another according to His inner promptings. **The apostles devoted themselves to the ministry of the word, i.e., teaching the people** (Acts 6:4). This training paid off, because when the believers were scattered in the persecution following Stephen's death, they were prepared to preach the word where they went (Acts 8:4). **Wherever the gospel was preached, there were always teachers recruited to follow up new converts by instructing them in the word. Barnabus recruited Paul to do that in Antioch of Syria** (Acts 11:20-26). **Mark went along with Paul and Barnabus to assist them** in this work (Acts. 13:5). When he proved unreliable, **Paul chose Silas as a helper** (Acts 15:37-41), **and soon recruited Timothy**, a young man steeped in the scriptures, who had an obvious gift and passion for teaching the scriptures (II Tim. 3:14,15; Acts 16:1-3). In Acts 17:11, we see the Berean converts eagerly receiving the word, and examining the Scriptures *daily* to see if these things were true. **The elder apostle taught Timothy to apply himself to the reading of scripture, the exhortation and the teaching of it** (I Tim. 4:14). He expressly taught that the scriptures were uniquely "God-breathed" and were profitable for teaching, reproof, correction and training in righteousness, that the person following God might be proficient, fully equipped for every good work (II Tim. 3:16,17). **Leaders were chosen based partly on their ability to teach** (I Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:6), and were to be especially valued if they labored hard in teaching and preaching (I Tim. 5:7; I Thess. 5:12,13). **In fact, it is the clear expectation of the NT that we all ought to become teachers, in some fashion or another** (Heb. 5:12; Matt. 28:19,20; II Tim. 2:2,24). It is quite clear that a key focus of Jesus and the early church was helping new believers learn the word of God. They devoted themselves to teaching it, preaching it, and the converts devoted themselves to learning it.

Peter talked about the word of God in terms of the "precious and exceedingly great promises" contained therein. Specifically, he spoke in terms of how these promises can help us escape the corruption of the world, and learn to share in God's very nature. **What are some benefits that can come from knowing and following the word of God?** God told Joshua that if he meditated on His word, and followed its wisdom, God would make his way prosperous, and he would have **success** in life (Josh. 1:8). David said that **God's word would restore the soul, make the simple wise, bring joy to the heart, and enlighten the eyes with understanding. He said that God's teachings are more desirable than gold, and sweeter than honey,** and that those who follow them will avoid danger and obtain a great reward (Psa. 19:7-11). **It is interesting that the longest chapter in the Bible is an ode to God's word.** David wrote Psalm 119, a 176 verse alphabetic acrostic poem dedicated to the benefits of studying, memorizing, and mediating on the scriptures. Each verse in stanzas of eight begins with the same letter in Hebrew, working through the entire alphabet. As you can imagine, such a poem took great skill and dedication to compose. **Do you think it is coincidental that the Holy Spirit inspired David to write this?** There is no other chapter of the Bible that comes close to it in length. This is not merely the ramblings of some Old Testament saint who loved to study. **This is a message to us from the Holy Spirit. God is telling us that there is great treasure to be found if we would only study His word.**

Maybe it seems boring or difficult to study, but this is a matter of faith. Just as God chose to save us through the foolishness of a simple message preached and believed (I Cor. 1:21), in a similar way He has presented us with a choice to believe what He says about the very valuable and exceedingly great promises contained in this book. **Either we believe what He says, and begin to study, learn, meditate and build our lives around this revelation He has made available to us, or we choose to disbelieve Him and disregard His word.** If we do so, we will miss out on what Peter called "precious" and "exceedingly great". It's up to you.