

Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc www.dtminc.org Today's Date: August 21, 2011

Are You in the Jesus Race?

by Dan Trygg

“Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win.²⁵ Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.²⁶ Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; ²⁷ but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.” 1Corinthians 9:24-27

“...discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness; ⁸ for bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. ⁹ It is a trustworthy statement deserving full acceptance. ¹⁰ For it is for this we labor and strive, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers. ¹¹ Prescribe and teach these things. ¹² Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe... ¹⁵ Take pains with these things; be absorbed in them, so that your progress will be evident to all. ¹⁶ Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you.” 1Timothy 4:7-12,15,16

As you read the NT, it is very clear that Jesus and His close followers had a very different objective for life than the world around them. In fact, a big part of their message was to attempt to persuade others that there was something higher and more important to live for than what most people were pursuing. **Most people are caught up in the endless pursuits of prosperity, power and pleasure**, at whatever level we find ourselves. For some, it is a matter of survival from starvation, some measure of control over their seemingly hopeless circumstances, and simple physical pleasures of the body. For others, it is simply to obtain a little more, to enjoy some greater measure of self-expression and self-determination, and to furnish their lives with nicer things and more pleasing experiences. Others are driven to pursue the best and the most as the measure of their achievements, looking to be served by others as the sign of their self-importance, and pleasures of the mind and body associated with luxury and indulgence. In addition, there are many others who are “on a mission” of some kind or another, people who have disciplined and ordered their lives to accomplish some higher goal they have come to value. Some of them have gone to great lengths, expended great amounts of money and effort, to accomplish their goals, many of which are “worthy causes”. We could learn a great deal from their determination and discipline, even if their goals may be a little short of the mark. **The question is, “What are you living for? What are your objectives, and what are you doing about them?”** Is there one organizing principle, one “high goal”, which gives direction and order to everything you do?

Many people don't even think this way. They are living in the immediate. They are not “big picture people” at all. They are thinking only in terms of what is on *their* schedule for today, ...who they will see, what they will do, just for today. **One of the most dramatic contributions of God's interaction with His people in history is the notion that life has meaning. History is going somewhere. There is an end point, ...and there is an evaluation** (Acts 10:42; 17:31). We are all given opportunities and resources, and we are expected to make good use of them. **We are not given time, money and abilities only for our pleasure alone. We have a responsibility to our Maker and Provider** to serve His interests in this world, ...and because He loves humankind **we also have a responsibility toward our fellow human beings.**

Salvation is not a free pass from this responsibility. It is a rebirth and refocusing of our lives around the central purpose of all existence, the summing up of all things in Christ (Eph. 1:10). Everything is to point to Jesus. Why? Because not only were all things made through Him and for Him (Col. 1:16), but He Himself is the highest expression of God's wonderful character and heart. “God so loved the world that He gave His only Son...” (Jn.3:16). **This is not negotiable, or up to a vote. This is what God has determined the focal point of history will be.** God is working all things toward that end. He is at work to spread abroad the tidings of this incredible love. **He is recruiting people who are willing to live for Him, ...people who are willing to make His priorities their own. This is what being a disciple of Christ is all about, following Jesus into all the will of God for our lives.**

It is important to see that this is centered on developing an interactive relationship with God. God doesn't want our best efforts to “do what is right”, or to “be good”. The Christian life is so much more than that. **He wants to work in us to transform our mindsets so that we learn to see reality differently. He wants to give us life, freshness and joy**, where we were feeling powerless, stale and empty. He wants to quicken the light in our eyes, and put a new bounce in our step. **He wants to fill us with the motivations and promptings of His Spirit. He desires to express through us the love and generosity of His heart. This does not happen automatically, however.** God is a gentleman, He does not barge in uninvited. **We must cultivate a relationship with Him that is substantial enough so that He can and will respond to us, ...and we can and will respond to Him.**

How does this work? How do we develop such a relationship? He gives us an important clue in I Samuel 2:30, “Those who honor Me I will honor, and those who disregard Me will be disregarded by Me.” **If we want a relationship with God that is deep and intimate, we must show Him that we value Him.**

How do we do that? (1.) By honestly sharing our hearts with Him (Psa. 145:18; Jn. 4:23,24); **(2.) By ordering or arranging our lives** so as to draw near to Him (Psa. 50:23; Acts 2:42); **and (3.) By living according to His values and preferences** (Matt. 28:19,20; Jn. 14:15,21), ...especially by *joining Him in His work, and by doing things His way.*

Every meaningful and lasting relationship must be built upon honesty. If you are trying to be fake or bamboozle someone, in what way do you really respect them? You may be attracted to them, but **if you don't respect them enough to tell them the truth about yourself, then whatever relationship that may develop is a mirage,** anyway. A lot of people try to treat God that way. They act one way in church, and say nice, acceptable religious things when they are in the church crowd, but when they are away from there, they are entirely different. What is *that*? That is *fake!* That is *phony!* **Some say they want a relationship with God, but their actions and thoughts when they are away from the “religious compartment” of their lives reveal that they are really chasing after other things.** Where they actually spend their attention, time and money indicates what they *really* value, what they *really* love. The Bible says that **God looks at such behavior as two-timing Him, ...as spiritual adultery.** I just was talking with someone the other day who discovered that her boyfriend was cheating on her. She was devastated! How did she feel? She felt betrayed. Her initial reaction was to have nothing more to do with this man! God feels the same way about dishonesty and cheating. **He will not open His heart to such people. He withdraws from them** (Isa. 59:2). **He reserves His intimate counsel for those who respect and honor Him** (Psa. 25:12-14). Unlike human beings, however, He is never fooled by our antics. He knows the score, even when we are trying to con Him. It is sad and immature, but God continues to reach out to us. **If we repent and get honest, He is willing to work on establishing an honest, healthy relationship. He will not play games, however.**

What does it mean to “order your life to draw near to God”? It is an extension of the principle expressed in Amos 3:3, “How can two people walk together *unless they are agreed?*” Again, it is like any other relationship. If you were attracted to someone, and wanted to develop a relationship with them, then you would *try to find a way to be where they are,* or you would *set up a time to meet and interact* with that person. You would find out what is important to them and take an interest in those things. **Do you want to walk and talk with God? It will require an investment of time, effort and attention on your part.** This is where the spiritual disciplines come in. **Spiritual disciplines are ways by which you make yourself accessible and attentive toward God.** Again, like other relationships, this requires more than sitting your butt down in front of the Lord. You may be sitting there physically, but your mind may be filled with distractions. **Learning to center yourself, ...to quiet yourself, ...to focus and be attentive..., requires self-discipline, determination and practice.** Likewise, going through the motions of reading the Bible or devotional readings will not be profitable, unless we learn to tune in to what He is really saying, ...not some ethereal “hidden meaning”, but doing the work to understand the context and argument flow of a passage to grasp what truth God intends for us to learn. Also, fasting, simplifying your life, **giving up things for God shows He is important to you. Investing time and money in what is important to Him also indicates that you are seeking to honor Him.** As we have seen, He opens His heart to those who honor Him.

The purpose of the spiritual disciplines is to become someone God wants to interact with. Again, the practice of these activities are just dead, empty rituals, *if* we do not have a genuine desire to be transformed. However, these exercises can not only help us learn to come into the presence of God, ...*where we can receive grace,* revelation and His inworking power to produce growth within us..., but they also can build avenues of expression and service, ...*where we learn to walk out that grace* in practical action. **As we apply ourselves to draw near, God reveals more of Himself, His heart and His direction to us.** As we respond in agreement with His heart, He entrusts more and more to us. **Our agreement with Him comes to be more than an appointed time or activity; it comes to be an agreement of heart and character and lifestyle.** As our inner life is transformed, our outer life also changes.

The passages at the top of this study express the urgency and importance for applying ourselves to this training process. Paul encourages us not to play religious games, or allow ourselves to “dabble” at our spiritual walk. **Take it seriously. Don't just go through the motions.** Train hard in order to win. Spar so as to be in shape for a real opponent. Bring your body under your control, so that it is a tool submitted and available to God, ...not the thing that controls *you!* He exhorted Timothy to “take pains with these things, be absorbed in them, so that your progress will be evident to all”. **Progress. Transformation. That is the name of the game. People should see that we have changed, and are changing.** There *is* a spiritual race to be run, ...a gauntlet of testing, struggle, spiritual obstacles and battles to fight our way through. God will give us the strength and strategy to get through whatever faces us, but He will not put us out where we are not able to handle the stress. *He will do great things with those who have made themselves ready.* **Are you in the Jesus race? Are you in training to excel, to run your race to win?**