

Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc www.dtminc.org Today's Date: September 11, 2011

If You Aim at Nothing, You're Sure to Hit It

by Dan Trygg

“And we proclaim Him, admonishing everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present every person mature in Christ.” Colossians 1:28

“Epaphras, who is one of you, a slave of Christ Jesus, greets you. He is always contending for you in his prayers, in order that you might stand mature and having been fulfilled in all the will of God.” Colossians 4:12

“...until we all reach unto the unity of the faith and of the experiential-knowledge of God's Son, growing into a mature person, unto a measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” Ephesians 4:13

“Not that I have already obtained this or am already fully-mature, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me His own. ¹³ Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you.” Philippians 3:12-15

I was having lunch with someone today, and he related to me a story about a friend of his. They were meeting together to talk, and the friend said some crass, really inappropriate things. Immediately, as if to excuse his behavior, he said, “Oh, it doesn't matter. I will ask for forgiveness, and it will all be OK.” **The message communicated by this person was that it is OK to live at the same moral level as non-Christians, because the grace of Christ was readily available to cover his faults and errors.** Furthermore, this person didn't really believe that it was *possible*, or even *expected*, that we could be holy. “Isn't that what grace was *for*,” this person reasoned, “because God knew we were sinners, and *couldn't* live righteously?”

Sadly, this person was espousing a fairly common misperception of what the Bible teaches. **He was in a religious tradition that really emphasizes grace as a “free pass” from judgment or punishment.** Since Christ provided a limitless amount of grace, it was freely available to cover his poor choices in behavior or speech. In fact, that was what the Christian life was about, to this poor fellow. It was to recognize that he could not hope to live righteously. **He had only to acknowledge his faults and ask for forgiveness, ...and everything would be good between him and God.** As often as he screwed up, he just needed to ask for forgiveness, and God would “take care of it”. **He could even “sin boldly”, knowing that Christ's grace was sufficient and readily available to cover even that indiscretion.** He was a sinner, after all, and Christ came into the world to save sinners. God knew that he couldn't be righteous enough to be acceptable to Him on his own, so God provided Jesus' blood to “cover him”. Dressed in the righteousness of Christ as his covering, God only sees Jesus when He looks at him.

While all of these statements may be true, as far as they go, the perspective of this individual is very one-dimensional. **The most effective and pernicious lies are those that are mostly true. One little misdirection can produce a drastically different outcome in one's journey.** For example, the fundamental belief this person has is that Jesus came to save people from the *penalty* of their sins. Compare that with what the Bible *actually* says, ...what the angel told Joseph, “...you shall call His name Jesus (Yahweh saves), for He will save His people from their *sins*” (Matt. 1:21). Whoa! That is an entirely different twist! Which is it, salvation from *the penalty*, or salvation from *the sins* themselves? If it is from the latter, then **the entire purpose for Jesus coming is to enable us to stop sinning, not just to “cover us” when we do. If we see grace as a “get out of jail free” card, there is no incentive to try to change.** In fact, we can easily come close to misusing grace as a “license to sin”. We think it is OK to continue on the same low level of morality and selfishness, because God has given us a “free pass”, no matter what we do. **On the other hand, if the purpose for Jesus' coming is to save us from our sins, then we will be motivated to try to discover how this works.** We will go deeper in our investigation of who Jesus is to us, and how we can obtain victory over sin in our lives. We will want to learn how to put off the flesh, and we will want to grow in Christ and learn to walk in the power of the Spirit. See the difference a small change in focus or expectation can bring about?

Of course, freedom from sinning is even too narrow a focus. Christ came for much more than that. He came to radically transform our entire being, starting with a new heart and a new reconciled relationship with God (Ezk. 11:19; Rom. 5:1,10). **Jesus came to make possible for us a completely different source and focus for life.** Instead of living for ourselves, by our own strength, according to our own limited understanding and selfish desire, **Jesus came to open up to us a life lived for the glory of God, by the strength of His indwelling Holy Spirit, according to His super-human direction, ...a life that will move us into the soul-satisfying and beneficial will of God for our lives.** Instead of living for our own desires, by our resources, self-awareness, and self-ability, Jesus invites us to follow Him into a life of seeking first the Father's will, living by the insights, direction and power of the His Spirit to become people that reveal the character and heart of God to the world. **Instead of a self-centered life,**

we are called to a God-centered life. Instead of a life characterized by works of the selfish flesh, we are to become people characterized by the fruit of the Spirit, ...people who are known as loving, joyful, peaceful, patient, kind, good, reliable, gentle and in control of ourselves (Gal. 5:19-23). **We are to become people who are good, and who do good** (Eph. 2:10; Tit. 2:14; 3:8,14; Heb. 10:24). Our lives should become like Christ, and our actions should benefit others enough that they would praise God for us (Matt. 5:16; Eph. 5:8-11; I Pet. 2:12).

Paul tells us to present ourselves to God as living sacrifices, dedicated to Him (Rom. 12:1,2). This is the reasonable response to what God has done for us. He exhorts us not to be *conformed* to this present evil age, but to be *transformed*. **How can we be transformed? Transformation begins by getting a new perception of life.** New awareness, new insights, new understandings open up new possibilities, new options. **Transformation is a process that requires effort and investment on our part.** If this were not so, then it would not be necessary to *command* us to be transformed. It would happen naturally. Ongoing growth and transformation generally will *not* take place without an investment of time and energy on our part. **We have to want it, and we have to pursue it, or we will stall out in our level of maturity in Christ.** Some people, like the fellow in the first paragraph, seem to be unaware that there is anything more to the Christian life than a grace that brings forgiveness. They are content to live as sinners who appeal to grace to cover their bad choices and inappropriate actions. This is *not* biblical Christianity, however. This is not *at all* what God intended. This is a very substandard Christian experience, if it is “Christian”, at all.

If we don't get stunted by ignoring the need to deepen our understanding of who we are now in Christ, what God has done for us and made available to us, and closing our minds to what He may want to do with us, many of us get stuck on the next step. **Transformation is not just an intellectual learning process, it requires experimentation.** Many of us like to live in a fantasy world in our minds, but we *do nothing* to actually change the way we live. We read, study, listen, attend meetings, but we do not incorporate any of that into practical action. We live life on autopilot, and the programming we are making our decisions by is the same old programming we lived by as non-Christians. We compartmentalize our lives so that we have a Christian information box in our heads, full of information about the Bible and what righteous behavior should be, but we somehow remain disconnected from that in our day-to-day choices. **In practical experience, we know very little about life in the Spirit, because we do not practice what we learn to integrate it into our experience.** For all that we may read or pray, we don't see any *change* in our lives, because we don't *change* the way we live. We *still* approach the situations and relationships of our lives the same way we did before we knew Christ. **We still talk the same way, act the same way, and treat others the same way we did before, yet we are surprised to see that we still get the same results we used to get!** “Where is God?”, we may say, but the truth is we have not made any room for Him in our lives. AND, if that is all we are *expecting*, and we simply go on putting the “Jesus patch” over the holes in our lives, thinking that is what Christianity is all about, *we will stay right there*, ...sometimes for years..., and there will be no growth. No! **The Scriptures tell us that we are to get knowledge, and then add self-control to implement these new insights into our lives** (II Pet. 1:5-8). We are to experiment, to “test-out-by-trial”, to find what God's will may be, and how it works. This is what Romans 12:2 is actually saying. Some versions say that we are to “prove” (KJV, NASB, RSV) or “discern” (ESV) what the will of God is. The NIV translation gets closer to the original. It says we are to “test and approve”. The point is that it requires repeated action, experimentation and calibration. It is like learning a skill, or developing coordination. **Book learning and new ideas must be tried and implemented in the crucible of real life to discover what works for me.** There is no other way.

The passages at the top of this study all speak of maturity. **The apostles understood that following Jesus is a process of growth.** We *are* to develop and mature, however. We are *not* to stay at the same level we have been at for years. **We should always be growing and changing, becoming more and more like Christ in our character and behavior.** Childish thinking and behavior is for children. Those who mature will think and act differently. They must put away childish thoughts and behaviors to do so, however (I Cor. 13:11). They must embrace growth, taking on more responsibility and greater challenges. The same is true, spiritually. **Those old, fleshly attitudes and behaviors are for spiritual babes. In fact, Paul says as much** (I Cor. 3:1-3). Yes, grace *is* available to cover our sins, but grace is also available to empower us to live, to energize our spiritual gifts and open up our calling in the Body of Christ. **Grace is never an excuse for sin. Grace is given to teach us to put aside sin and to live sensibly, righteously and godly** (Tit. 2:11,12). If we set our standards and expectations low, we will settle for a substandard Christian life. **If we expect to be no different than those who don't know Christ, we probably won't be. If we aim at nothing, we are sure to hit it. If, however, we allow God's Word to inform us as to what is possible, our hopes, expectations and goals will be entirely different.** We can *expect* freedom from sin, intimacy with God, spiritual gifts, effective ministry, Christlike character. These are our *birthright*, ours to attain through growth and discovery. Don't waste a minute. Don't excuse a thing. Yes, time *is* a factor. Yes, growth *is* a process. **Don't miss, because you took aim at nothing. Be like Paul and aim for the highest. Press on for all God has for you.**